Honey, if you stay, I'll be forgiven

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Honey, if you stay, I'll be forgiven

by adventuresinaverage

Summary

So, really, it was live with Robby or hang out in an empty house trying not to relapse. Living with Robby seemed more interesting.

(Langdon moves in with Robby after rehab. Feelings and hijinks ensue.)

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Langdon did go to rehab in the end, not because he wanted to, but because he had nothing else to do.

Robby would not, under any circumstances, let him back in the hospital. He'd gotten the other attendings on board too – god knows what he told them – so Langdon was on a forced, indefinite leave of absence. And when Abby had found out, she'd left, taking the kids back to Connecticut to stay with her parents. They were definitely getting a divorce, and Langdon knew enough about parents with addictions to know that he wasn't seeing his kids again until there was an official custody order.

So, really, it was go to rehab or waste away in an empty house. Rehab seemed more interesting.

The thing about rehab is there is *so much therapy*. Robby had pulled some strings to get him a bed at a dual diagnosis center, even though technically Langdon had zero diagnoses, so Langdon worked on his addiction and his depression at the same time. Turns out, Langdon was deeply depressed. Who knew?

Langdon spent a month and a half in group sessions, individual sessions, doing equine therapy (which he still thought was a load of crap), learning how to meditate and journal. All of that would probably have been fine except that he was trying to talk about his feelings while he was actively withdrawing. He spent two weeks feeling sick, really sick. He remembered what one of his professors had said about chemotherapy: the process was essentially just slowly poisoning someone and then, when they were on the brink of death, saving everything but the cancer. It was a good way to describe chemo. It was also a good way to describe detoxing in a rehab center. He was not in a space to make any major breakthroughs until halfway through his stint.

That's also when Robby started visiting. Langdon didn't have any visitors at the beginning of his stay and hadn't expected any throughout his time there, especially not Robby. When one of the nurses told him a coworker was there to visit, Langdon had expected

to see King.

But it was Robby, who'd driven three hours to see him, saying he would have come earlier but he wanted Langdon to get through the worst of it first, asking how he was doing, if he needed anything. They did not talk about the day Robby found out. Which was just fine with Langdon, who hoped he'd never have to talk about that day with anyone, ever again (although he knew that he'd probably have to "process" it with Sandra, his very efficient - and frankly pretty nosy - counselor). That first visit, Langdon mentioned offhand how much he missed the bagels at the coffee shop around the corner from the hospital.

Robby came back exactly a week later, bagel in hand.

He came a few times a week the entire time Langdon was in rehab, spending a few hours talking about nothing, asking how Langdon was. He always brought some kind of snack from home. Once, he'd brought an iced coffee that had turned to room temperature on the drive. They'd laughed about it and Langdon drank it anyway, relishing the taste.

He was glad that Robby was visiting him. It made it clear that things were okay, that Robby still cared. But there was a distance, a wall that they'd built since Robby had found the drugs. Langdon hated it, but he knew this was more than he deserved.

The last time Robby visited him, he asked, "Are you excited to get home?"

Langdon shifted uncomfortably. "Sure," he lied.

"Yeah?"

"I mean, I'm getting a divorce, so. Not a lot of home to get back to," Langdon said, shocking himself. He and Robby hadn't talked about Langdon's home life the entire time he'd been here. He wasn't sure why he was suddenly comfortable unloading like this. Maybe it was all the therapy. Maybe it was the fucking horses.

Robby's eyes grew wide. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah. I mean, I had to tell Abby why I wasn't going to work, and she didn't like the reason." Langdon tried hard to keep the edge out of his voice. He knew that Robby wasn't to blame for his marriage falling apart – thanks Sandra – but it was still hard not to feel that way.

“Jesus, Langdon. I’m sorry.”

Langdon shrugged. “It can’t be helped.”

“So, you’re going back to your house alone?”

Langdon nodded.

“That’s a terrible plan.”

“Yeah, everyone in here says that too. But I don’t have another option, really.”

“Stay with me.”

Langdon blinked. He’d never even seen the inside of Robby’s apartment. “What?”

“I have an extra bedroom, and you cannot go back to be alone in the giant house you shared with your wife and kids. Not while you’re this early in recovery. Come stay with me for a bit.”

Langdon’s eyes narrowed. “Is this because you don’t trust me?”

Robby sighed and ran a hand along the back of his neck. “It’s partly because I don’t trust you. But I also want you to get better. I want to help you, if you’re finally willing to let me.”

So, really, it was live with Robby or hang out in an empty house trying not to relapse. Living with Robby seemed more interesting.

Chapter End Notes

> Could not leave this ship alone. Expect angst! Forced proximity! Langdon being a sap! Robby being Bad At Feelings! Langdon having a mild obsession with judging the people on House Hunters! This baby's gonna have it all.
>
> Title is from Famous Last Words by My Chemical Romance. I'm going to the opening night of their tour and v excited about it so get ready for a lot of angst here because I am exclusively listening to The Black Parade while I write this.

Chapter 2

Robby comes to pick him up when he gets discharged. He takes a frankly embarrassingly long time going through the discharge instructions with the nurses, asking a thousand questions about what Langdon is allowed to take, what he can eat and drink, when his follow up appointments are. Langdon sits in the chair next to him, thinking that he could probably just do this part himself, because while he has been making some intensely terrible decisions lately, he is, in fact, an adult. But he's tired – his back has hurt for a month and the beds in here are horrendous – and he likes the feeling of not being the center of the nurses' undivided, intense attention for once, so he lets Robby go through the discharge plan with them, line by line, for an hour and ten minutes.

When they get up to leave, Langdon hears one of the nurses mutter to the other, "Doctors have to be the worst patients." He speeds out of the office.

Robby thankfully lets him sleep on the drive back to Pittsburgh. Somehow, a reclined front seat in a Jeep is more comfortable than the beds in rehab. He's happy that Robby's not needling him with questions or trying to make small talk. He feels a very specific comfort around Robby, but since everything happened he's not really sure what to say.

He sleeps dreamlessly for most of the drive, waking up just outside of Pittsburg when Robby stops for gas.

"Hey," Robby says as he climbs back in the car. "How're you feeling?"

"Good," Langdon says.

"Really though."

Langdon looks out the front window, staring at the gas station convenience store. Really, he's feeling like it's complete bullshit that he isn't allowed to have drugs. He's on a low level of Lexapro now, and Sandra assured him that they would ramp it up slowly. But if he can have that, why can't he just have some fucking Librium? Something to blunt his brain, slow it down, stop him from spiraling every time he remembers how fucked his life is. Now that he's this close to Pittsburg, he feels a sense of dread hanging over him, pulling at his brain. The nausea he feels is different than the withdrawals,

worse.

“Not that good,” he says.

“Is that all I’m getting from you right now?”

“Yeah.”

“Fair enough.” Robby looks into the backseat at the three duffel bags Langdon had brought to rehab with him. “Do you need me to go pick up some stuff for you? I can drop you off and go to your house.”

“Nah,” Langdon says. “I have what I need for now.”

“What about your car?”

“Oh.” Right. The treatment center had picked him up, and Robby had brought him home. His car was probably still sitting in his driveway.

“I mean, there’s probably no reason for you to need it right now,” Robby says, starting the car.

“Well, I would like to be, you know, mobile.”

“You can use the Jeep if you need it.”

“This monstrosity?” Langdon asks incredulously. He gets that people love Jeeps, but he doesn’t feel the same. This car feels like a box on wheels. It makes him miss his Audi.

“Bertha is not a monstrosity,” Robby replies, eyes on the road. “She is a saint.”

“You *named* it?”

“Do you not name your cars?”

“No.”

“You need to introduce some whimsy into your life.”

Robby doesn’t bring up picking Langdon’s car up again, so Langdon assumes the matter is settled: he’s going to have to use this giant hunk of metal if he wants to get around anywhere. Langdon is suspicious that Robby doesn’t trust him with a car when he’s at work and/or not around to monitor where Langdon is going. Which is annoying until Langdon reminds himself that Robby’s well within his rights to not

trust him, and he probably shouldn't, and Robby's been doing way more for him than he needs to, and practicing gratitude would help his emotional state.

Thanks again, Sandra.

"Can we stop at Target or something?" Langdon says. "There are a few things I need to pick up."

"Are you sure?" Robby says. "That's a lot. You can give me a list if you want. I can drop you off and-"

"Robby. I appreciate the desire to tread lightly, but I have to reintegrate into society at some point. No time like the present."

Robby looks like he absolutely hates this idea, but he nods.

Langdon hates admitting when Robby is right. But standing in the shampoo aisle, with all of the noise of people taking and the fluorescent lights and the overwhelming fact that he has to make a choice about what to buy, has him sweating. Literally. He hasn't been sober in a store in an embarrassingly long time. Seriously, how do people live like this?

"You good?" Robby whispers. He's been standing just this side of too close the entire time they've been in the store, and Langdon would tell him to back off if it wasn't so immensely comforting. In rehab, Langdon had almost forgotten how Robby made him feel, and he's determined to keep their relationship above board now. Strictly professional. But breathing Robby in, the scent of cedar and salt, feels so soothing it's dangerous.

"If I stay in here for more than five more minutes," he murmurs, "I'm going to snap like a twig."

Robby exhales a laugh, chooses a shampoo for Langdon, throws it in the basket with the other toiletries and snacks Langdon chose before his brain decided to short circuit, and places his hands on Langdon's shoulders.

Fuck .

"Time to go," Robby says, seemingly unaware that every nerve under Robby's hands is lit up. He directs Langdon to the checkout and handles everything while Langdon stands next to him, dazed by the overstimulation of the store and Robby's brief touch. In the car, he

feels immediately tired again, but he stays awake because Robby is talking to him.

“I took tomorrow and the next day off, so I’ll be around for you if you need anything. And I made sure that your first few shifts back were with me. I’ll try to keep you and Santos away from each other, but that won’t be forever. You have free range of the apartment, obviously, and your room is a little small, but I made sure it’s clean-“

“Robby,” Langdon cuts him off. He just needs quiet for a minute. He knows Robby has to control every situation, but this is not a situation that can be planned out.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be. Thank you. This is… you didn’t have to do any of this.”

Robby shoots Langdon a glance, then focuses back on the road. “I know.”

Robby’s apartment is beautiful, a restored third story walkup with high ceilings and original molding. The front door opens directly into the open concept living room/kitchen. The living room is decorated meticulously with dark green and brown furniture and accents. It looks like it’s out of a magazine. The kitchen, on the other hand, looks like someone forgot that it existed. It’s completely bare and impeccably clean.

“Not a big dinner-at-home guy?” Langdon asks.

“I know how to do a lot of things. Cooking isn’t one of them. And you know, I think I can live with that.”

“So he does have flaws.”

“Don’t tell Dana,” Robby says, and he’s smiling, but Langdon doesn’t think it’s a joke.

Robby shows him to his bedroom, which is small, but it’s cozy, a big window letting light pour onto the hardwood and the queen bed, which has a huge blue duvet and four pillows. It looks so comfortable Langdon might cry.

“Can we continue the tour later? This bed is calling my name.”

“Yeah,” Robby says. “I’ll get your bags from the car. Make yourself at

home.” And then he’s gone.

Langdon lays down on the bed. Now that he’s alone, he can still feel the warmth of Robby’s hands on his shoulders.

Okay, he has maybe harbored a crush on Dr. Robby for a year or two. Okay. Maybe since the first day of his residency. And okay, maybe it didn’t matter before because he was married and he knew that workplace crushes happened all the time. And maybe he spent all of rehab trying to shed the crush, because he had thrown a bomb on his relationship with Robby and he was coming back to work on probation and he knew things would feel different now that he was (admittedly unwillingly) single. And maybe Robby inviting him to live here, touching him at all, makes Langdon feel warm in a way he can’t describe.

But he’s not going to do anything about it. He’s going to be good. He’s going to thank Robby the only way he knows how: by making sure everything about this arrangement stays as simple as possible.

Chapter 3

The first month passes slowly. Langdon feels like a baby, learning how to walk - if that baby just happened to be vaguely pissed off every second of the day. Everything feels foreign. It's not like he was *always* high – he wasn't. But he'd been high, or coming down from a high, or thinking about getting high, for a long time, and that had clouded his sense of the world, his understanding of his own place in it. Now that he's sober, everything looks and feels different, like someone has handed him his life back but forgot to give him the instruction manual.

He's fallen into a stable, if uneasy, routine. Recovery is a full-time job. He sees Sandra virtually once a week. The sessions mostly consist of Sandra asking annoyingly good questions and smiling at Langdon until he answers, and then reminding him in the last five minutes that he can't solve his problems by setting them on fire. It's pure agony. Langdon would probably die without Sandra.

He finds an NA meeting that doesn't make his skin crawl, so he starts going twice a week, three if things are really going off the rails. His insomnia is out of control thanks to the lack of benzos helping him sleep - his brain seems to be actively resistant to switching off - so he switches between the day shift and the night shift at work, depending on which version of "barely coping resident on probation" he feels like being that week. Healthy? Maybe not. Better than taking five Librium and waking up 17 hours later on a bathroom floor? Definitely.

Well, not *definitely*. But close enough.

He starts running most days, because Sandra tells him he needs vitamin D and to feel more connected to his body. Which, okay, sounds like something you'd hear on a wellness influencer's YouTube channel, but as usual she's not wrong. He used to run all the time, before the drugs, and he missed it so much, the feeling of breaking free of something, tiring yourself out.

No one has said anything to him about caffeine, so he drinks Red Bull like water. The effect of the caffeine is the complete opposite of the Librium and Ativan – instead of slowing him down and blurring the world, it brings everything into sharp focus, turning the volume of his brain all the way up and pushing fast forward, and all Langdon can do is run after it. But it makes time pass in fast, jittery blips rather than long hours, so he keeps drinking it. He also chews gum constantly.

He'll put a stick in his mouth when he wakes up and chew the entire day, only switching out for a new stick after lunch. It anchors him, gives his body something to do with all this energy when he doesn't know where to put it.

Apparently, this is what recovery looks like: sleep-deprived, slightly manic, trying to account for every second of his day so he can hopefully go more than five seconds without thinking about Ativan. It's going fine, thank you very much.

Abby is, mercifully, letting the kids talk to him over the phone every now and then. Abby doesn't talk to him – she says it's better because of the divorce. She calls him and immediately hands the phone to Tanner, barely saying hello. Every time the kids hand the phone back to her, she says, "Take care of yourself," and hangs up. It twists Langdon's gut every time.

Living with Robby has been… interesting, in the way that walking a tightrope over broken glass might be considered "interesting." Langdon thought it would be fun. He didn't think they'd be braiding each other's hair or anything, but he thought living with Robby of all people would be comforting, healing. Some solid ground after his life has been turned upside down. Instead, it's just incredibly awkward.

It's not like they don't spend time together. They watch games on TV or read in the living room or eat dinner together – Langdon does know how to cook and he's been making increasingly elaborate dinners on his days off to pass the time. But there's a polite, quiet but ever present tension taking up space in the apartment, an undercurrent that seeps into every interaction he and Robby have. It drives Langdon crazy. He wishes Robby would just yell at him. Every day seems to cast a light on the distance between them, the way things have shifted and cracked. Langdon knows Robby doesn't trust him anymore, doesn't see him the same way. And he understands. He lied, constantly, up until and then after he was caught, about the kind of thing you don't come back from. Still, it's almost impossible to swallow the change in their dynamic.

And, god, the hovering. It's not obvious, not in a way Langdon can call out without sounding ungrateful or paranoid, but it's obvious enough to raise that tension just a little too high. Robby is always around, watching. If Langdon is in his bedroom a millisecond too long, Robby's knocking on the door with some vague question, asking if he needs Robby to pick anything up for the store or if he's seen Robby's charger. Also, whenever Langdon so much as stands up to

leave, Robby is quick to offer to drive him wherever he needs to go. Which would be fine except for, you know, the tension.

And maybe those are real questions. Maybe Robby is just being nice. But it's starting to feel a little like surveillance, like Langdon is grounded for an unspecified length of time. He gets it. Truly, he does. He feels worse about what he put Robby through than anything else in this mess, because he knows how deep the betrayal cut. But it's like Robby doesn't trust him here and doesn't trust him out in the world. It's stifling. It's suffocating him.

The only reason he hasn't blown a fuse is that still – *still* – he craves being close to Robby. Any way he can be. There's a not insignificant part of him that aches whenever Robby looks at him a certain way, that curls inward and hopes against hope that Robby sees him as something more than a resident, a fuckup.

There are these moments that Langdon doesn't know what to do with. Once, Langdon is curled up under a blanket on the couch and making fun of Robby for how cold he likes it in the apartment. It's a rare moment where their old relationship seems within reach. Robby's folding laundry on the couch next to him, and he pulls one of his hoodies out of the laundry basket and tosses it to Langdon. "Keep it," he says, smiling but avoiding eye contact. "It looks better on you anyway." Langdon goes to bed that night with a headache from turning the moment over in his mind so many times.

Langdon has to remind himself almost daily not to be an idiot. That Robby is just a nice guy. That pity looks a lot like tenderness if you squint at it, if you feel guilty enough, if you want too much.

Thankfully, work is going much better than Langdon expected. He's definitely the subject of gossip, and he doesn't have the same respect he used to, but that feels oddly okay. He doesn't have to be *the* Frank Langdon. He can just be a doctor. He is so overjoyed at the fact that he has a job at all, a place to come most days to be useful. And he's still a good doctor. He hasn't lost his edge since getting sober, which makes sense because he really *didn't* come to work high.

He and Mel get into a rhythm as if Langdon never left. He's sure she's heard something, sure she knows. But she never says anything. She just smiles and makes a beeline for him every time they work together, always asking how he's doing. She asks his opinion on everything. Langdon wonders if this is how Robby felt about him before everything - so much pride when he got something right, so

much drive to teach when he got something wrong. It doesn't take long for him to grow to love Mel, feel like he has a little sister in the ED. He wishes she would be more confident. He wishes she knew what a good doctor she is. He also wishes people would stop whispering that they're sleeping together. He can tell it makes Mel uncomfortable - she told him once that she had never been interested in sex, and he can feel that she doesn't know how to handle the water-cooler-on-steroids environment that is The Pitt.

But Mel is plugged into the rumor mill whether she wants to be or not, which is how Langdon gets most of his information about Robby these days.

For instance, Robby is apparently dating someone. Mel and Langdon are updating their charts one day when Mel says, apropos of absolutely nothing, "I never would have guessed that Dr. Robby is into guys."

Langdon swears he hears a record scratch in his brain. "Sorry?"

"Oh, I was just saying because of Dan."

"Who?"

"Dan. Dr. Robby's boyfriend. Or, I don't know, is that what he is?" Mel asks, looking at Langdon like he should have the answer.

"This is the first I'm hearing of him."

Mel's brow furrows. "Oh. I think he's been seeing Dan for probably two months. He dropped Dr. Robby off once and kissed him on the cheek, and everyone flipped out for some reason."

Langdon is glad he wasn't here for that. He would have definitely flipped out. Not in a good way.

"Dr. Collins knows the most about it. And Dana, but she won't give a lot away. Does Dan not come over to your apartment?"

"No," Langdon replies. If Mel says this guy's name one more time, his head might explode.

"Strange. Anyway, I don't really know why everyone cares about who everyone else is dating."

"Me either," Langdon mutters, caring very much about who Robby is

dating.

Dan and Robby. Robby and Dan. Langdon turns it over in his head until his stomach hurts, unfounded jealousy mixing with unrequited desire and forming a rock in his gut. Of course it's a guy. Of course Robby didn't tell him.

He does not need to ask Collins about this, because that would definitely start the rumor mill, and Collins and Robby have been pretty close recently, and Langdon doesn't want his snooping to get back to his roommate. He also just doesn't need to know the details. It's not like the curiosity is eating him alive or anything.

He makes it about 45 minutes before he sidles up to Collins, who's typing away on a computer at the nurse's station.

"Heard an interesting rumor today."

Collins gives him a sidelong glance and a wry smile. Langdon is very thankful that Collins's opinion of him hasn't changed since everything went down, at least not outwardly. They came up together, and her opinion means a lot to Langdon. "Yeah?" she says.

"About Robby. And a gentleman caller."

Collins rolls her eyes, but she doesn't lose the smile. "I was wondering when you were going to ask about this."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I know you. I know you want to know every single thing about Robby. And I know he's being withholding."

"So give me the details."

Collins purses her lips. She goes back to typing and says, "Okay, his name is Dan, he's a psychology professor at Pitt, they apparently met because they start their runs at the same park, they've been together probably six weeks that I know of, it's not serious, and Robby was really pissed when Dan kissed him in the car. Whitaker saw and now all the interns know, and Robby's pretending they don't."

"How do you know all this?"

"Because before their first date Robby asked me if I thought it was a bad idea for him to date a psychology professor."

“And you said?”

“I said it was a bad idea for him to be dating anyone. He was so not himself because of…” she cuts herself off, stops typing.

“Because of?” Langdon prompts.

“I’m not getting in the middle of this.”

“The middle of what?”

Collins sighs and looks at Langdon. “Screw it, fine. I’m telling you this in confidence because I think Robby is being a total asshole to you. And also so you can properly make amends. Robby fell apart when you left.”

Langdon’s heart stops. “Really?”

“Completely. I mean, a lot went down that day, PittFest and the anniversary of Adamson’s death, so for the next few days everyone was a mess. But everyone got better, and then the day you went to rehab it was like he backslid. He was snapping at everyone, he’d hide out in the bathroom multiple times a shift, he wouldn’t go near any drug-related injuries unless he had to. Dana called Abbot twice to come in early and let Robby go home. Pretty much everyone caught him crying at least once. I told him to call you, but he wouldn’t. He said you wouldn’t want to hear from him and that he didn’t know what to say to you. But I guess I eventually wore him down because he went to see you. And after that, he got back to being Robby again.”

Langdon feels like the air has been sucked out of the room, out of the planet. A small part of him is happy to hear that Robby did actually care, but a larger part of him wants to vomit. What was he thinking? He can’t even remember his rationalizations for keeping Robby out of it, and he can’t believe he was so selfish.

“I’m such a fuckup,” he groans, putting his head in his hands.

“Maybe. Probably,” Collins replies. “But you’ve got a second chance now. You can be better. You can make it up to him. Robby loves you, Langdon, you know that.”

“Not anymore he doesn’t.”

“Yes, he does. He’s worried about you. He cares about you. Just because he’s keeping you at arm’s length doesn’t mean his feelings

have changed."

Langdon looks up then. "What feelings?"

Collins sputters. "You know. Love, like, brotherly love, and respect, and… Jesus Christ." She takes a breath and says, "I'm telling you this in confidence too, mostly because *I do not want to be in the middle of this* and he'd rather take a scalpel to the eye than say anything. But there's a reason Robby doesn't bring Dan over to your apartment."

Langdon… doesn't get it. "Yeah, because he doesn't want me to know anything personal about him."

"Oh my god, you two are *idiots*. There is a bigger reason that Robby doesn't bring Dan over. There's a reason they aren't serious, that he hasn't been serious with anyone in years."

Realization dawns on Langdon slowly and then all at once. "Me?" he chokes out.

Collins nods.

He says the first and only thing that pops into his head. "But… I'm married."

Collins shrugs. "Probably why he's never said anything. And, to be blunt, you're not married anymore. I think that's probably freaking him out."

"Fuck."

"Yep. Now that I've dropped that bomb, I do have patients to get to." Collins stands up and turns to go. She turns around and says, "Listen, I told you this to help you. But I promise you, if you two don't figure this out and you put me in the middle of your shit with him, someone will actually be taking a scalpel to the eye. You or Robby, I don't care. Whoever I can get to first."

Then she leaves Langdon standing at the nurse's station, feeling like a deer in headlights.

Chapter 4

The next week, Langdon is having a terrible shift. Night shifts are great for his insomnia, but they're terrible for recovery. Night shifts have a lot more drug-related injuries, and Langdon's insides feel like they light on fire whenever they lose someone to an overdose. On top of that, he mostly used at night so he could calm down from work or go to sleep, and now he has some fucked-up Pavlovian response to the sunset where his cravings intensify when it gets dark.

And today is just an especially bad day. Abby's divorce attorney left him a voicemail while he was taking a pre-shift shower to introduce himself and ask if Langdon had counsel, which he doesn't. He didn't call back. He's pretty sure Robby is out with *Dan*, though he has no way to confirm it, which puts him in a foul mood. Santos is here, and while Abbot is just as good as Robby at keeping them apart, inevitably they have to work together, and Santos's death stare bores into Langdon whenever they're in the same room. His session with Sandra this afternoon was especially tough, and he's jumpy and exhausted all at the same time. He just wants a pill. Just one. One would be fine. Or maybe more, if the universe was feeling generous.

There are no major catastrophes, but Langdon's desire for pills ramps up every time there's a new admission, which is basically constant. He is so obsessed with getting drugs that he's barely able to focus on his patients, constantly asking them to repeat themselves or missing things in their charts. The lights are too bright in here, and he thinks he can hear them humming over the cacophony of sound from all the people. He has a headache, but seemingly everyone in the city of Pittsburg knows that he can only have Tylenol, and only the recommended dose, which doesn't work for anyone, let alone him. Around hour three, he knows things are only going to get worse, and he remembers what Sandra keeps telling him, that the best thing about everyone knowing he's in recovery is that they'll give him the passes he needs to get better. He finds Abbot and does something he has never done in the ED: admits he needs help.

"I'm really sorry, but I don't think I can be here right now," he says, forcing the words out of his throat. "I had a really weird day today, and if I see the drug cart one more time, I honestly might take a bat to it to get to the pills."

"No problem," Abbot says immediately, his tone comforting. "If you

need to go home, go home. We have it covered here, and if we have to call someone in we can."

"I am really sorry. I've never left early like this, and I don't want to, but I also don't want…" he trails off.

"To relapse? Yeah, I understand. Hey, I'm proud of you for doing the right thing here. You can't help other people if you don't help yourself. Go home, try to get some sleep."

So he does.

Robby is still gone when he gets home, and Langdon tries very hard not to think about what he's doing. Instead, he collapses on the couch and turns on the television. He flips through until he finds some reruns of House Hunters and promptly dozes off.

He shifts awake a little over an hour later when he hears the front door open. Robby steps into the room and immediately frowns at Langdon.

"Hey," Langdon yawns.

"What are you doing home?"

"I was -"

"You should be at work," Robby practically shouts, rushing to the couch in what Langdon would call an overreaction. "Why aren't you at work? Abbot didn't call me or anything."

"I came home early. Wait, why was Abbot supposed to call you?"

"What do you mean you came home early?"

"What do you mean Abbot was supposed to call you?"

Robby hesitates. Then he says quietly, "I asked Abbot to call me. If anything seemed… off."

"Are you kidding me? Jesus, Robby, do you want me to get an Apple Watch so I can show you how many steps I take every day? Do you want me to download Life 360?"

"I'm just trying to make sure you're safe. You came home and didn't tell me. How long have you been here? You could have been doing anything."

“I was *trying to sleep*. I know, why don’t we just hop on FaceTime and never get off so you can always see where I am and what I’m doing.”

“Langdon.”

“Maybe every time I come into the living room, you can frisk me for contraband.”

“Stop.”

“No, let’s call it what it is, because this is exhausting me,” Langdon barks, standing up to get in Robby’s face. “You don’t trust me. You didn’t ask me to live here out of the goodness of your heart. You did it so you could keep a firmer grip on me. Do you even like me anymore?”

“That’s not fair.”

“No? Because you follow me around like I’m about to guzzle pills in the shower, you look at me like I’m a time bomb, you won’t even let me buy a pack of gum without you being there. I came home from work because I was a breath away from relapsing and I needed to get out of there. Is that what you wanted? Do you want me to relapse so you can be right about me?”

“Shut the FUCK up!” Robby shouts. “Don’t ever say something like that. Don’t ever pretend you know what I want.”

“So fucking *tell me*, Robby!” Langdon yells back. It’s so easy to yell. He feels like someone has lifted the lid on a box he’s been stuck in, and he can finally get out and stretch his legs. “Tell me what this thing we’re doing is! It’s not friendship. It’s not forgiveness. It’s barely even pity! What is it?”

Robby chokes out a laugh. “Forgiveness? Oh, are we at forgiveness yet? I missed the part where you said you were sorry!”

“I’ve been saying it *every day*! I’m making dinner, I’m cleaning the apartment, I’m going to therapy and getting a fucking divorce and going to work and staying sober and putting up with your cold shoulder. What more do I need to do? Get on my knees?”

Langdon does not miss the split second that Robby’s eyes darken. It makes Langdon’s mouth go dry. He would. He would absolutely get on his knees for Robby.

“I am furious,” Robby says quietly, “and you don’t get to tell me when I’m supposed to feel better.”

The words punch Langdon in the chest, but it feels good. They’ve been dancing around this for weeks, and all he wants is for someone to scream at him, list the ways he screwed up, stop handling him with kid gloves. Langdon is so fucking *angry*, at himself, at the world, and he realizes suddenly that he needs someone right there with him, mask off, indulging in the loss of control.

“You lied to me,” Robby continues, voice rising with every word. “For god knows how long. I sat across from you, at work, at the park, at the fucking bar, and I thought I knew you. Like, really knew you. I thought I saw *you*, not just the hotshot star resident. You had everybody else fooled, right? You didn’t let them see your insecurities, your flaws. But me? You let me in. I thought.”

He slams his hand against the wall, hard enough to make Langdon jump. “But you had me fooled, too,” he says, laughing ruefully. “You were just giving me the version of you you thought I’d like the best.”

“That was me, though. That version of me, it was real.”

“Come on, Langdon. Are you lying to me or yourself right now? I cared so much about you. I didn’t want the shiny, charming, ED Ken that smiled through his back pain and told me he was just tired, just stressed, just whatever the hell it was. You have no idea what it was like that day. You have no idea what it’s like finding out that your best resident, your – your *friend* has been drowning and pretending they’re fine. And he’s been dragging everyone else down with him.”

The words are pouring out of Robby like they’ve been stuck just behind his teeth for a month. They cut into Langdon like knives, and he wants it, he *wants* this, the anger and hatred he feels toward himself reflected in someone else. He’s pissed that Robby let this build up so long, and he’s pissed that he’s sober, and he’s pissed at himself for wanting the drugs, and he wants Robby to push him again, to kick him while he’s down. He’s sure he’ll have to talk about this in therapy, but right now he wants to tap into it. He eggs Robby on.

“So are you mad at me?” he asks. “Or are you mad that you were too blind to see what was happening?”

“You piece of *shit*,” Robby bites out. “It’s everyone else’s problem, isn’t it? Blame everyone but yourself for *your* screwups! Of course I’m mad at myself. But I’m also mad at you! I’m mad because I trusted you, you

told me I could trust you! And you didn't trust me back!"

Langdon blinks. That was… not what he expected. "Wait, what?"

Robby sinks onto the couch, curling in on himself, running his hands through his hair. "Why didn't you come to me, Langdon? I lose sleep at night over it. I keep going over everything in my head and I just don't understand why you didn't tell me. Instead, you fucked me over. You put me in a shitty position. And you know I would have done anything for you."

Langdon is shocked out of his anger. It's rare to see Robby this vulnerable, and Langdon's fury is replaced quickly by guilt. He sits on the couch, too. "I guess… I just didn't want you to see me any differently. I didn't want you to see this part of me."

"Well, I sure do now."

"Yeah." Langdon hesitates, and then he asks the question he's most afraid to hear the answer to. "Do you still think I'm that guy?"

Robby's lips twist into a smirk. "You mean the guy that stole drugs from my ED and then came back to work after I kicked him out? The guy that asked me not to report him? The guy that told me I was worse off than him because I had a panic attack?"

Langdon can tell Robby's being sarcastic, but he winces. "Yeah, that guy."

"No." Robby replies seriously. "No, I don't think you're that guy. But I don't really know who you are anymore."

"Me either," Langdon says, and then he's crying, huge, uncontrollable sobs out of nowhere, his body shaking with the effort. It feels like a release, a purge. It's embarrassing, crying like this in front of Robby, but if Langdon's honest with himself, he knows that it was bound to happen eventually.

After a minute or two, he feels a hand on his shoulder, pulling him in. He's enveloped by solid arms, held against a broad chest, inhaling that specific scent. Robby holds him tight, shushing him as he finishes crying and catches his breath. Langdon buries his face in the crook of Robby's neck. He doesn't want to leave this space. Robby's presence calms him more than anything else has since he left rehab.

"Fuck, I am sorry," Langdon chokes out, resisting the urge to nuzzle

Robby's collarbone. "I can't believe I haven't said that yet. But I am. I am."

"I know," Robby whispers.

They stay like that for a while, neither of them moving except to breathe, until Langdon absolutely has to shift because the angle is killing his back.

Robby lets him straighten out. "You feeling okay?"

"Yeah, it's just, my back hurts."

"You want Tylenol?"

"I could eat tic tacs and it would be more helpful than Tylenol. I just need to lay down."

"Lay down here."

Langdon is confused, so he doesn't move for a second. Robby takes the opportunity to cup Langdon's face in his hands and slowly, gently, lay him down so he's laying on the couch on his back, his head in Robby's lap.

"Okay?" Robby asks, and Langdon nods because this is *more* than okay, this is a dream, this is more than anything Langdon could have asked for. He feels his dick twitch, which is supremely embarrassing, but he reminds himself he hasn't been touched, basically at all, since he left for rehab.

"Movie?" Robby asks.

"No, let's keep it on House Hunters. These people have terrible taste."

Langdon keeps his back on the couch and turns his head to face the TV. They watch for a little bit in silence. He can barely concentrate. The warmth of Robby's thigh on his cheek, the rise and fall of his breath, the way his hand is casually draped on Langdon's torso, it's so intimate and careful. Langdon's body is a live wire.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded," Robby says eventually, looking down at Langdon. "About not knowing who you are."

Langdon turns his head to look at Robby. "You don't have to take it back."

“No, really. I just meant that I don’t know who you are now because… you’re different. You’re changing. And I’m just trying to catch up.”

“You don’t have a lot of catching up to do. I’m mostly in the struggle and fake it till you make it phase.”

“Yeah, but I see the work you’re doing. I know you’re making the effort and doing all of the hard stuff. And that makes me happy. I just… get so scared, Langdon.”

“Scared of me?”

“Scared *for* you.”

Langdon doesn’t know what to say, so he stays silent. Robby keeps looking into his eyes, wide and earnest. Without moving any other muscle, he lifts his hand from Langdon’s torso and cups Langdon’s jaw, running his thumb along his cheekbone. His hand is warm, and his touch is light, and Langdon closes his eyes and breathes against the contact. He has to physically stop himself from leaning into it, taking Robby’s thumb in his mouth and sucking. He’s half-hard, and he knows these scrubs do nothing to hide that.

Langdon opens his eyes and sees Robby’s eyes darken again, the way they did when Langdon said he’d get on his knees. He swallows, watches Robby’s eyes follow his Adam’s apple. They stare at each other, and Langdon feels like it could happen, though he doesn’t know what “it” is.

And then, suddenly, Robby’s eyes snap back to the television. “This house is way overpriced,” he says, his hand finding Langdon’s torso again.

Langdon hums, his entire body feeling flushed, feeling like he’s in the Twilight Zone. They watch another full episode without speaking until Langdon’s curiosity gets the better of him. “Where were you earlier?” he asks.

He can feel Robby tense under him. “Out. With a friend.”

“A friend named Dan?”

Rather than relaxing, Langdon feels Robby get even more tense. “Um. You know about Dan.” It’s not a question.

“Yes, Robby, everyone in The Pitt knows about Dan. It’s the interns’

favorite subject of discussion. *Mel* told me about it, and she hates gossip."

"God. Why do people give a shit?"

"I think it's a big moment for people when you prove that you're a human being and not a medicine drone."

"Jesus Christ."

"Hey, I, for one, think it's great that you have a boyfriend. I think it's especially great that he's a psych professor. I wish my therapy was free."

"He is not giving me free therapy. And he's not my boyfriend."

Langdon's heart skips a beat. "No?"

"No. We have fun, but it's not like that. It's not exclusive."

"Well, you can always bring him over here. You don't have to hide him. Or me."

"I'm not hiding anyone. Like I said, it's not serious. He doesn't need to see where I live. That's a little intimate."

Langdon exhales a laugh. It's so like Robby to date someone for over a month and not let him in his apartment. He thrills a little at the memory of Robby inviting him to live together after rehab, how easy it was, like Robby didn't have to think about asking and Langdon didn't have to think about accepting.

They keep watching TV in silence. Eventually, Robby gets tired of HGTV and starts flipping through channels, landing on a basketball game that had a late tip-off. Langdon doesn't mind. He just wants to stay like this, quiet and peaceful, feeling like some ice has broken. Also, this couch feels so good on his back. He might start sleeping out here.

After a few minutes of the basketball game, Robby moves his hand to Langdon's hair, combing through it lightly. It's hypnotizing, and Robby keeps doing it, and Langdon isn't even really turned on anymore, just comfortable, his heart swelling.

He falls asleep on Robby's lap, solid and dreamless for the first time in half a year.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Langdon wakes up the next morning still on the couch, alone. There's a huge green duvet over him.

He realizes that he woke up from sounds coming from the kitchen. "Breakfast?" he calls, still laying on the couch.

"Yeah," Robby replies. "I mean, it's coffee and a microwaveable Jimmy Dean sandwich. You want one?"

Langdon's stomach turns unpleasantly, but he says, "Sure."

A few minutes later, Robby comes into the living room with two wet, pathetic-looking breakfast sandwiches on a plate and two mugs of coffee, one black and one with enough cream to make the liquid look more white than brown.

"Your milk," Robby teases as he puts the cup of light coffee on the coffee table in front of Langdon. Langdon sits up, still wrapped in the duvet, and Robby sinks down next to him.

"Did you bring me this?" he asks, motioning to the duvet.

"Yeah, didn't want you getting cold. And you were sleeping pretty hard for the first time since you got out of rehab, so I didn't want to wake you up."

"Thanks for that. This thing feels like a cloud," Langdon says. "A very expensive cloud."

Robby shrugs, tearing into the sandwich. "I'll pay good money to be comfortable."

"And yet you eat actual garbage for breakfast."

"We can't all be Doctor Chef," Robby retorts.

"You know you're an adult man and not a fifteen year old boy, right?"

"Jesus, you woke up raring to go. Does this mean that you aren't going to eat yours?"

“You’re going to eat two of those?”

As if to answer the question, Robby finishes the sandwich that’s in his hand and picks up the one that was meant for Langdon.

“Did you eat vegetables at all before I moved in?”

“Not unless they were in a microwavable dinner. And some protein shakes have a serving of vegetables in them.” Robby takes another bite of his sandwich and says, “Not the protein shakes I drink. Just, in general.”

“How are your arteries not completely clogged?”

“I balance my very unhealthy eating habits with a lot of time lifting weights.”

Langdon’s mouth waters at the thought of Robby sweaty in gym shorts. “Not a bad balance.”

Robby shrugs again. “Could be better. You off today?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna just hang out here today. You?”

“I’m off too. I’ve got some stuff to do during the day.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?” Langdon hopes Robby asks him to tag along.

He doesn’t. He tenses slightly, avoids eye contact. “Just… some personal stuff.”

Langdon’s heart sinks. “Dan?”

“No,” Robby says quickly. He sighs. “I’m going to Al-Anon.”

Langdon’s breath stops. “Really?”

“Yeah, just to see what it’s like. I’ve never been before, but I want to help you. I want to support you. I don’t know why I feel so weird about going.”

“That’s… really sweet.”

“In all fairness to Dan, he suggested it.”

Langdon’s mood drops with his stomach. He feels betrayed somehow, although he doesn’t know if it’s fair. “You told Dan I’m in recovery?”

“Langdon,” Robby says, giving him a look he can’t interpret, “All we do is talk about you.”

A thrill shoots down Langdon’s spine. His lips curl just slightly. “I didn’t know you thought about me that much.”

“Sure I do,” Robby says. “I want to do this right. With you.”

Robby stares into Langdon’s eyes for a long moment. Neither of them moves a muscle, and it feels like an eternity. *Touch me*, Langdon thinks. *Just do it.*

“You know,” Robby says suddenly, breaking eye contact. “Recovery.”

Langdon’s stomach twists, but only a little. He hums and leans back on the couch, drinking his coffee. He turns the TV on and flips to HGTV. House Hunters is on again.

“Excellent,” he says, curling into his blanket.

“You want to keep watching this?” Robby asks, sounding genuinely shocked.

“You don’t want to see everyone’s terrible life choices? I mean, seriously, this house is hideous,” Langdon says as the couple on the screen look through a truly heinous McMansion.

“Maybe they like it.”

“I cannot abide bad taste.”

Robby smiles and rolls his eyes, then gets up off the couch. Langdon is sad about the loss, but he can barely bring himself to care. He has never given a shit about House Hunters in his life, but now it’s like he can’t look away. It feels good to feel some superiority over someone again, even if that person is on an episode of a TV show that almost certainly aired for the first time over three years ago. It gives his brain something to do, making up stories about these people’s lives, deciding that he doesn’t like them because they hate butcher block countertops.

Robby comes back after a few minutes, wearing his glasses and holding a book, and settles next to Langdon on the couch, close enough that Langdon could lean onto him, curl into him again. He can practically feel Robby’s fingers in his hair. He takes a breath to center himself, focusing on the television. He feels Robby shift as he pulls

something out of his pocket, and then he sees Robby's hand in front of him, holding a small silver rectangle.

"You brought me gum?" Langdon asks, taking the stick out of Robby's fingers.

"Yeah. You've been chewing it like that girl in Willy Wonka recently. You usually start early, but you don't seem like you want to get up yet. So. Yeah."

Langdon smiles as he pops the stick in his mouth.

They don't move much for most of the morning. They never do when they're off. Langdon has always tried to be as immobile as possible on his mornings off, recovering from his last shift and storing energy for his next one. Even now, when recovery and its unrelenting obligations make him feel constantly antsy, he relishes the few hours he gives himself to do nothing. They sit together, Robby reading, Langdon playing armchair quarterback for every couple on HGTV, both of them avoiding touching each other.

This is normal. Just a regular morning. Nothing to see here.

Around 11, Robby says he has to get ready. He takes a shower and then heads to the Al-Anon meeting, smiling at Langdon as he closes the front door behind him. Langdon is immediately jumpy. He stays on the couch for exactly three minutes, then gets up to start pacing. He just needs to make the time go by quickly. He just needs a distraction – the tech bro "best friends" looking for a sleek condo in the middle of the city aren't cutting it.

He changes into clean clothes and brushes his teeth. He goes for a run. He runs for an hour, more than enough time to wear his body out enough to mimic a sense of calm. Also enough time for an Al-Anon meeting.

He goes home, takes another shower, and settles into his bed to pretend to read a book. He'll probably have to wait fifteen or so minutes, but then Robby will come back and tell him about the meeting.

Fifteen minutes pass. Then thirty. Then one hour, then two.

Langdon's chest constricts. As a rule, he never texts Robby to ask where he is, mostly so that he doesn't give away how much he cares. He's not breaking that rule now. Anyway, he can guess where Robby

is.

He throws the book on the floor and pulls out his laptop, searching through streaming services for something that will adequately distract him from his own imagination. He can't stop picturing someone else's head in Robby's lap, Robby calming a goddamn psych professor down until he falls asleep. As if Dan needs Robby the way Langdon does. As if Dan understands how lucky he is.

He tries to remind himself as he presses play on a random action comedy that Robby could be with anyone. Abbot, maybe. Or someone from Al-Anon wanting to make him feel welcome in the community. But he knows. He feels it in his gut. And it drives him insane.

Langdon seethes through one movie and half of another, hating himself for not being able to just fucking take a nap. He takes another shower just to pass the time. Suddenly, the day is gone, and Langdon realizes he hasn't eaten at all today, and he needs to make dinner whether he wants to or not.

He's been getting really good at pizzas recently. He's pounding on a roll of dough when he hears the front door open.

"Hey," Robby says as he comes into the kitchen. "Oh, pizza? Great, I'm starving."

Langdon stops kneading the dough and turns around. "How is he?"

Robby freezes. "What?"

"Dan. How's he doing? That's who you were with, right?"

Robby looks like a trapped animal for a second. Then his face falls. "Langdon, come on."

Langdon nods. "Great. You know, it would have been nice for you to tell me that in addition to going to a meeting, you also needed to process it with your therapist boyfriend for six hours."

"Stop. I told you, he's not my boyfriend and he's not my therapist."

"Does he know that?"

"Is that your business?"

Langdon knows it isn't, but he won't admit that. He scoffs and goes back to his pizza dough. "Whatever, Robby."

“No,” Robby says, walking over to him and putting a hand around his wrist to stop him from kneading. Langdon feels a jolt of heat shoot up his arm. “Why is it your business what I do in my spare time?”

“It’s not.” Langdon wrenches his arm away. “I don’t hear the end of it if I don’t give you second-by-second updates of my whereabouts, but by all means, go do whatever the fuck you want.”

“I’m not the one who stole drugs from his job.”

“Fuck you,” Langdon snaps. He goes back to beating the pizza dough within an inch of his life, but Robby doesn’t leave. He just stands there behind him, arms crossed.

“Do you need something?” Langdon says finally.

“I need you to chill out about Dan.”

He takes a breath, turns back around, and then asks a question he does not want the answer to. “Did he go with you? To Al-Anon?”

Robby doesn’t answer.

“Oh Jesus *Christ*!” Langdon yells. “I can’t believe you!”

“It was a big fucking deal to go, and he suggested it, and I didn’t want to go alone – “

“I go to meetings alone *all the time*! Of course it’s a big fucking deal. It’s supposed to be. It’s supposed to be…”

“Supposed to be what?”

“A big deal for *us*, Robby! Why does this guy have to have his fingers in everything? It’s like having a third fucking roommate, only you refuse to acknowledge it.”

“You don’t get to control my life.”

“Yeah, you’ve made that abundantly clear. I’m not allowed to have any say in your life at all, even when it affects me.” He realizes that he’s white knuckling the kitchen counter and his breath is coming in big gasps. He doesn’t know when he crossed the line from *pissed off* to *unhinged*, but he’s leaning into it.

“You know what, Langdon, you can fuck off,” Robby bites out. He turns and stalks off toward his room. Langdon follows immediately.

He's not letting Robby have the last word.

"I'd love to, Robby, except I live here, and I'm falling asleep on your fucking lap and waking up to see that you *tucked me in* and then spending all day passing the time while you hang out with your boyfriend after going to an Al-Anon meeting."

"I told you he's not my boyfriend!"

"Cut the shit. You started seeing him when I was in rehab. It's been *months*."

"And? It's not serious. It's barely a thing. It's just…"

"Just what?" Langdon yells. "Just sex? Just therapy? Just a sober guy to play boyfriend with?"

"Call him my boyfriend one more fucking time! God forbid I have a life outside of you, Langdon. Jesus, it's nothing!

"If it's *nothing*, why are you seeing him?"

"I don't owe you an explanation. You're acting like a child."

"Actually, I think you *do* owe me an explanation! You're out there with some guy you don't even care about, and I'm right here, and you keep making me think you want us to be something else. I keep hoping you want me to be more than your fuckup roommate, but you'd rather fuck some random professor."

"Maybe, *maybe* it could have been more than this. God, I wished it could be more than this. But you've been out of rehab for two seconds and I'm trying to get my shit together while you're living with me and I can barely focus on anything except making sure you're alive, so yes, sometimes I would like to just *fuck* someone without it being a big deal. Sometimes I would like to spend time in a place where everything is easy."

"You mean where everything is fake."

"You're such a dick."

"And you're a coward."

Robby inhales sharply, his nostrils flaring, his features hardening with anger. He avoids the accusation. "Why does this even matter to you? Tell me."

“Come on, Robby,” Langdon scoffs, trying to deflect because he will not say what he wants to say. “You’re not stupid.”

“No, I’m not. So just tell me. Just fucking say it, so we can get all our cards on the table.”

“You’re one to talk,” Langdon snaps. “You walk around this apartment touching me, staring at me, telling me you wish it could be more than this, and you expect me to sit around and, what, wait for you? That’s fucking insane. I don’t want you to tell me I matter and then act like I don’t!”

Robby crowds Langdon, his chest rising and falling in anger. “What’s it gonna take?” he growls. “What’s it gonna take for you to understand that I care about you?”

Langdon doesn’t say anything, and Robby grabs his shoulders, pushes him back until he slams him against the door, and it hurts, but it doesn’t matter, because Robby’s eyes are dark and his hands are warm. His hands find Robby’s hips, gentle, pleading. Robby doesn’t seem to be interested in gentle.

“Fuck,” Robby murmurs, and then he’s kissing Langdon so hard it pushes Langdon’s head back into the door. Langdon makes a choked noise, and Robby responds by sliding his tongue against his lips, unlocking them so he can press into Langdon’s mouth, hot and bruising and hungry. There is nothing tender or unsure about this. They kiss desperately, every emotion they’ve swallowed for months pouring into each other. All of Langdon’s shame, all of his jealousy, all of his longing – he gives it to Robby willingly, sinking into the press of their mouths like it will save him.

Soon, he’s motivated only by sensation, fucking into Robby’s mouth like he needs it, grabbing Robby’s shirt like a lifeline to pull him closer until their chests are pressed together, and Langdon can feel the heat of Robby’s body through the fabric of their shirts, the way his chest vibrates when he moans. He reaches under Robby’s shirt to explore his lower back while Robby holds Langdon’s face in his hands, gripping tight, not letting him move. He wants more, god, he *wants*, and when Robby shifts to suck on Langdon’s lower lip a low moan escapes his throat before he can do anything about it. He can feel Robby getting hard on his hip.

Robby pulls away to kiss at Langdon’s neck. “This is such a bad idea,” he says, not showing any signs of slowing.

“Yeah, really bad,” Langdon breathes, because an infinitesimally small part of him agrees, but he can’t bring himself to care. He shoves his hands in Robby’s back pockets to grab at his ass. Robby grunts.

“When’s your next shift?” he asks against Langdon’s skin.

“Two days.”

Robby bites into Langdon’s neck and sucks hard, and Langdon groans, his legs almost giving out. The thought that Robby wants to *mark* him is almost hotter than the act itself.

“Is this what you need?” Langdon asks, his voice low, different. He kisses Langdon’s jaw. “Do you need me to convince you that you don’t need to be jealous? He should be jealous of *you*.”

The words make Langdon’s cock throb. He can tell that he’s leaking precome, and he wants to get lost in this, in the feeling of Robby’s palms pushing up his shirt, the weight of his body pinning him to the door. He feels, honestly, like he’s sixteen, like this is all new to him again, thrilling and terrifying and so hot. “I need you,” he says, whiny, almost involuntarily, but the way Robby looks at him with a wicked little smile makes Langdon think he doesn’t need to be embarrassed.

Robby leans in and kisses him again, slower now, lazier, his tongue heavy in Langdon’s mouth, his hands in Langdon’s hair, like he’s savoring this. He grabs the back of Langdon’s knee and pulls it roughly against his hip, then grinds into Langdon once, slowly, teasing. Langdon moans again, overwhelmed with the feeling of Robby’s cock against his. He reaches for the button of Robby’s jeans.

Robby grabs Langdon’s wrist and pulls away, looking like he just woke up from a trance.

“Everything okay?” Langdon asks, still breathing heavily.

“Shit,” Robby mutters. He moves away from Langdon, and the loss almost hollows him out. “*Shit,*” Robby says again, almost a shout.

“What’s up?” Langdon asks, a pit forming in his stomach.

“I shouldn’t have,” Robby replies, and he’s suddenly across the room, as far from Langdon as he can possibly be.

“But you did.”

“Yeah.”

“Like, you really kissed me. And now you’re on the other side of the room.”

“Yeah,” Robby repeats, running a hand through his hair.

“Don’t do this,” Frank says, barely audible, trying not to beg. Trying, honestly, not to cry.

“I’m sorry.” It’s earnest, but it’s not enough.

“Well, I don’t *care* if you’re sorry,” Langdon spits, feeling the tears hot on his cheeks. “I can’t do this, Robby. I can’t have half of you.”

“I don’t want to give you half of me. But we’re not ready. We need to be ready for this.”

“You don’t get to tell me what I’m ready for.”

“Frank,” Robby whispers, stepping closer. “Can’t this just be enough right now? While we’re trying to get through our shit, can’t it just be enough that we want this? Good things come to those who wait, and all that.”

It’s not enough to want this. Langdon has wanted this for *so long,* and he’s tired of Robby feeling like he gets to call all the shots. He hates this, the constant push-pull dynamic, Robby giving just a little and then taking it away.

But a little is better than nothing. Langdon nods.

“I’m getting pretty tired,” he says. They both know it’s a lie – Langdon doesn’t get tired anymore, he barely sleeps. Plus, it’s barely 8 pm. But he leaves Robby’s bedroom and goes into his own.

He strips down to his boxers and lays under the covers. He’s sweating. He keeps thinking about Robby’s mouth on his, his hands in his hair.

Can’t it just be enough to want this?

Langdon turns onto his side. All he does lately is want. Right now, he’s so keyed up, so desperate for a release, and he can’t stop thinking about the hollow shake of a bottle, the weight of a pill on his tongue. He can still feel it, the moment the Librium hits, the shift in his view, in his blood. He thinks about the sleep he could have, deep and uninterrupted, barely moving for twelve hours.

Fuck. Maybe he does need to work on his shit a little more.

There's a knock at the door.

If he's honest with himself, Langdon knew this would happen. Or at least he'd just been hoping.

"Come in," he says, and Robby opens the door, wearing pajama pants and a tee shirt and his glasses, looking vulnerable, somehow younger.

"You awake?"

"No, this is the ghost that lives in Frank Langdon's room."

"Okay, good to see you're doing well." He steps into the room. "I was wondering – Jesus – I was wondering if I could sleep in here."

"Robby."

"I know."

"You can't keep doing this. This isn't fair."

"I *know*." Robby runs a hand across his face. "I just... want to be near you. I'm sure that's selfish."

Langdon sighs. He wants to say that Robby deserves a pass, because Langdon has been selfish enough for the both of them. He wants to say that it can't be selfish if both of them want it. He wants to say that he would give anything to be near Robby all the time. Instead, he just says, "Come on."

Robby crawls into bed next to Langdon. For a minute, they both lay on their backs, staring at the ceiling, not touching.

He can feel the heat of Robby's body beside him, the shift of the mattress when Robby moves. He stares at the ceiling fan like it has answers to the questions that are knocking around his brain. For example, how did he stumble out of rehab and run smack into Robby's half-measures? Is he just a sucker for pain?

"You're very quiet," Robby says.

"Didn't realize we were doing commentary."

"Well, normally you're filling the silence with some sarcastic comment or a joke about how much better you are than everyone else. You're

barely ever quiet. It's suspicious."

"Maybe I'm evolving."

"Away from sarcasm? I don't see how that's possible."

"Wow, you're being really charming tonight."

"There's the sarcasm."

Langdon turns to face Robby. "What the fuck are we doing?"

There's a pause, and then Robby turns to face him. "I don't know," he says. "I wish I did, but I don't. I just… don't know what this is."

"It's you. In my bed. After kissing me and then saying, very eloquently I might add, 'shit.' I'm dying here, Robby. You have to tell me what you want."

"Right now, I just want this."

"I'd say that's fine, but I don't actually believe you."

"Frank," Robby whispers, and he pulls Langdon to him, and Langdon shifts so his back is pressed against Robby's chest and Robby's got his arms around Langdon's waist. It's unbearable how close they are to throwing caution to the wind. But at least they're close.

"If I feel you getting hard, I'm kicking you out," Langdon says. Robby laughs.

"You're a menace."

"And yet you're here. What does that make you?"

"A masochist," Robby replies, placing a chaste kiss on Langdon's shoulder.

"Very sexy," Langdon deadpans.

Robby laughs again, wrapping his arms tighter around Langdon, and Langdon just lays there, feeling so physically safe while his mind refuses, as usual, to slow down. He still has so many questions, but he's afraid to ask them, to break this fragile peace. *Is* this enough? Wanting it all and getting just a little, fighting with and then holding each other, placing his whole heart in Robby's hands and praying he doesn't crush it? He genuinely doesn't know.

Robby drifts off eventually, still holding Langdon. Langdon doesn't fall asleep, but it's okay tonight. He feels strangely calm right here, on the edge.

Chapter End Notes

Quick round of apologies
Sorry for this chapter being so long (not really though)
Sorry to anyone who really loves Jimmy Dean
Sorry to anyone who thought it would be smooth sailing if Robby and Langdon just kissed a little

Chapter 6

Robby and Langdon are, it turns out, very good at not talking about it.

Not that Langdon isn't thinking about it all the time. He plays the night in his head over and over, the way Robby tasted, the sounds he made. And after, the way he held Langdon, the steady rhythm of his breathing as he slept while Langdon passed the time fantasizing about what his life would look like if he wasn't in recovery and Robby was emotionally available. The kiss felt like a fight. But after… it felt so tender it aches.

The next night, Robby and Langdon are sitting on the couch and Robby says he's going to go to sleep. Langdon nods, entranced by the couple on television that can't decide between a colonial style house and a literal farm (he's stopped playing Cable Roulette and just started streaming House Hunters. He's accepted this part of himself).

Robby touches his hand. Langdon looks at him and knows the question before Robby has to ask it.

"Sure," Langdon says. "Let's go."

They pad into Langdon's room, pull off their jeans, and crawl into bed together. Robby holds him tight against his chest.

"Thanks for letting me come in here," Robby whispers.

"Please. You're doing me a favor."

The day after that, Robby's working while Langdon is off. When he gets home, Langdon is already in bed. Robby falls in next to him without needing to ask.

They start sleeping together every night, adding the ritual to the list of Things They Don't Talk About. They don't kiss again, don't do anything other than cuddle and talk until Robby nods off, leaving Langdon to slip in and out of sleep, curled into Robby's body.

Not talking about the kiss is hard for Langdon, especially the week after, when he has to look in the mirror every day and see the giant hickey on his neck stubbornly refusing to fade. It is supremely embarrassing to go to work with it, although when he works with Robby he catches him staring at it in a way that warms his chest.

At least now everyone at work has something to talk about other than Robby's love life.

"Holy shit, Langdon," Collins says when she sees it.

"I dropped something," Langdon replies, begging her to accept the world's lamest excuse and leave it alone.

"Right. You lifted something over your head despite the near-constant pain in your lower back, and then you dropped it on your neck, where it landed and gave you a mouth-shaped bruise."

"The least you could do is not acknowledge it."

"Please. Everyone is going to acknowledge that. It's massive."

"It's not like I asked for it."

Collins leans in a little, lowers her voice. "What did Robby say when he saw it?"

Langdon gives her a pained look. She frowns, then her eyes widen, and she pulls Langdon into a supply closet.

" *Robby* ?" She hisses as soon as the door closes.

"Yes."

"Oh my god, I can't believe this. I mean, finally!"

"Yeah, well, it's not like that."

"What do you mean?"

"He kissed me, and then he said it was a bad idea."

Collins glances at the hickey. "That doesn't look like he thought it was a bad idea."

"I think he just got caught up in the moment. And then he ended the moment." Langdon sighs. "And like fifteen minutes later he came to sleep in my room."

"I'm getting whiplash listening to this."

"Yeah," Langdon mutters, leaning against a shelf. "Imagine how I feel."

“Well, what did he say when you talked to him about it?”

“I just told you.”

Collins frowns. “What?”

“After he stopped, he said it was a bad idea. Something about the timing.”

“That’s not talking about it. That’s a sentence. Like, it’s technically language, but spiritually? Not a conversation.”

“Okay, then I haven’t had a conversation with him about it.”

“Why not?!”

“Why? He told me what he wanted. And at night, it’s the only time we’re really alone together, and I don’t want to bring that up in bed – “

“Whoa. What are you talking about?”

“Oh, yeah. Robby’s been sleeping with me every night since it happened.”

Collins stares at him for an uncomfortable moment.

“What in the actual fuck are you two doing? You’re not together, you won’t talk about why, and he’s still sleeping with you?”

“Well, it sounds bad when you say it.”

She scoffs. “Langdon. You are both *fully grown men* . Fully. Why are you acting like you’re in middle school?”

“I could do without a lecture.”

“Well, you need several. But I’ll keep it to one a day. Today’s title is Use Your Words. Look, you both clearly want this. Robby’s feelings for you are basically an open secret at this point. The way he looks at you when your back is turned is, frankly, embarrassing for him. And you’re not doing yourself any favors moping around with a vampire bite on your neck.”

“Heather, please. I’m trying, but… it’s complicated. You know it’s complicated.”

“Yeah,” Collins says, softening just a little. “But it doesn’t have to be *this* complicated. The two of you are acting like you’re in survival mode, like you’re not allowed to have any joy. And that’s just patently untrue.”

“I just don’t think he wants… messy.”

Collins gives him a look. “This is already incredibly messy.”

“Yeah.”

They’re quiet for a second, then Collins says, “For the record, I don’t want to be the only person in this hospital who knows all of this. I told you I didn’t want to be stuck in the middle. And now I’m three seconds away from finding out your safe word.”

“Jesus, Collins.”

“I’m just saying, it’s getting very intimate out here. I deserve hazard pay.”

They’re both smiling now. “Well, thanks for the pep talk,” Langdon says.

“You needed one. You two are a disaster.”

“I tend to agree. But hey, it’s a good development, right?”

Collins rolls her eyes, but she smiles. “It’s something,” she says, opening the door.

The next day, Mel and Langdon are in the lounge, Langdon crushing his third Red Bull and Mel filling her water bottle.

“Is Dr. Robby mad at you or something?” Mel asks.

“I don’t think so,” Langdon says, his heart pounding. “Why?”

“He’s been giving you this really intense look all day,” Mel says. “And he’s not really talking to you like he usually does.”

“Does it look like he’s mad at me?”

“I can’t tell.” Mel takes a long drink of water and then says, “Maybe he thinks your hickey is inappropriate.”

Langdon wants to melt into his chair.

Having a massive, partially-requited crush on his roommate would be one thing, but Langdon also has a massive, partially-requited crush on his *boss,* which is a fun little way to suffer through his entire life. He stops taking night shifts, opting to stay on Robby's schedule so they can get more time together. But that means that when he has to clear something with Robby, he's clearing it with his attending and with the guy who woke up next to him in nothing but a ratty tee shirt and boxers, nuzzling his neck and asking if he got any sleep. When Robby is leading little meetings about patient satisfaction, Langdon's too focused on the barely noticeable stain on Robby's hoodie where he spilled soy sauce the night before to listen. When Robby stands behind him as he resets a dislocated shoulder and whispers "Good job" when he's finished, the words go straight to Langdon's dick, and from the look in Robby's eyes, that was his intention.

Their dynamic is complicated, but it adds a new, comforting layer to Langdon's recovery. Robby starts getting in bed before Langdon gets home from meetings, so when he gets home he can collapse into someone's arms instead of processing everything alone. After therapy, Robby's waiting in the living room, asking if he wants to talk about it. Langdon always says no, and Robby always lets him lean into his chest, always puts on House Hunters and suffers through Langdon's loud and constant commentary. Robby gives him space to talk to the kids, lets him lay in bed after the conversation is over, alone, and then knocks on his door a while later to check in. When Langdon wants a pill, he can let Robby take care of him, holding his hand and sitting with him until the feeling passes. They're not having sex, but life feels so intimate now, like all of Langdon's shit could actually fit into a regular life.

One morning on one of their days off, about a month after the kiss, Robby asks if Langdon wants to go to the grocery store with him while they're having their coffee.

"As much as I want to, because I think you need adult supervision in a grocery store, my back is actually killing me," Langdon says. "The couch is calling my name."

"No problem. I have to get going in a bit. I'm gonna go to a meeting before I go to the store."

Another item on the list of Things They Don't Talk About is Dan. Robby hasn't spent any time with him recently, at least not that Langdon can tell, and they've adjusted their schedules so they're basically spending every second of the day with each other, aside from

working out. But he can't help himself. He has to know.

"Are you going alone, or?" he ventures.

Robby cracks a smile. "Alone."

Langdon takes a sip of coffee to hide how much he's beaming.

After their coffee, Robby gets ready to leave while Langdon lays on his back on the couch, scrolling on his phone.

"Heading out!" Robby calls as he picks up his keys.

"If you buy more than two things from the freezer section, don't come back."

"Noted." He closes the door quietly as he leaves.

Langdon puts down his phone and stares at the ceiling for a long time, reminding himself that he is not actually in a lovely domestic little relationship with Robby, that things are actually very fucked up. But these quiet moments are getting more and more frequent, and wouldn't it just be nice to slip into this? Maybe Collins is wrong. Maybe they don't have to talk about it.

Yeah, and maybe they just don't have to kiss or do anything remotely romantic, Langdon thinks. Maybe they can just grow old and live together and bicker, like a sexually repressed Odd Couple.

He goes to the kitchen, opens the fridge. For someone who eats like an actual teenager, Robby has been keeping the apartment pretty well stocked with real food. Langdon suddenly wonders if he started doing that when Langdon moved in, and he feels a warmth in his chest.

He pulls out a random assortment of things: olives, onions, a shallot that looks like it needs to be used today, capers, butter, chicken. He finds tomato paste and crushed tomatoes in the cabinets next to some spaghetti. He gets to work.

Sandra loves that Langdon is cooking. She thinks it helps him be creative and keep busy in a way that is productive. She says that people can process a lot through food. She smiles knowingly whenever Langdon brings up Robby's inability to eat something fresh unless he cooks it.

"You like to be helpful," she says a lot. "Especially for Michael."

Langdon shakes Sandra's voice out of his head as he chops, boils, simmers, stirs. He seasons the chicken and throws it in the oven. God, this smells good. Langdon hasn't been eating a whole lot, but this is making his stomach rumble.

He's still cooking when he hears the front door open. "Hey," he calls, not leaving the stove. "How was it?"

"Good," Robby calls back. Langdon hears the clank of Robby's keys on the coffee table, the rustle of grocery bags. "Tough, actually. But good."

"Welcome to my life," Langdon replies.

Suddenly, Robby is behind him, *right* behind him, looking over his shoulder into the pan.

"Pasta?" Robby asks, almost in a whisper. His hand hovers close to Langdon's hip, his breath ghosting the back of Langdon's neck. The air around them feels charged, and Langdon's breath hitches just slightly.

He swallows and nods.

"Looks good," Robby responds, and in that tone of voice, Robby could be talking about anything, the sauce, the pasta, *him* .

But Langdon barely has time to consider what the hell is happening before Robby's stepping away from him to start putting the groceries away. "Is that going to be lunch or dinner?" Robby asks, in a normal tone of voice, like nothing has happened.

"Whichever," Langdon manages to choke out.

"Lunch it is."

Langdon can't concentrate on what Robby is saying to him while they eat. He's suddenly too anxious, too full of want, too desperate to name what's going on between them and give into it. It doesn't help that it's been… god, four months? five? since he had anything remotely resembling sexual contact, so now apparently close contact is really doing it for him.

"You okay?" Robby says, pulling him out of his thoughts.

"Yeah," Langdon says quickly. "Just need a shower."

Robby frowns. "Okay. I'm gonna do some laundry, you want me to get

yours?"

Langdon makes a non-committal grunt and practically runs to the shower. He turns it as cold as he can possibly stand it and stands under it, letting it shock and then calm his nervous system. What is wrong with him? He's been fine - more than fine - with the arrangement for weeks. But today, he woke up and looked over at Robby, warm and familiar in his bed, and they did their quiet morning routine, and all Langdon could think about was that conversation with Collins. They are grown men, and they're living like an adult couple, but they haven't had the adult conversation, and it's starting to kill Langdon.

Also, honestly, he just wants to kiss Robby again. Maybe more. Definitely more.

He decides he has to have the conversation. He has to know where they stand. And Robby's just going to have to deal with it.

He dries off and pulls on his pajama pants. He practices what he's going to say in his head as he walks into his bedroom, but his thoughts are interrupted by Robby sitting in his bed, back to the headboard, changed into gym shorts and a well-worn sweatshirt, glasses on, reading an old paperback. Like someone pulled a domestic fantasy out of Langdon's brain and 3D printed it.

Robby looks up from his book and does a double-take, his eyes raking over Langdon's body, stopping at the waistband of his pajamas, which are hung low enough to indicate that he is not, in fact, wearing boxers. Langdon thinks about putting a shirt on, but Robby's reaction makes him think better of it.

"Good shower?" Robby asks.

"Yep," Langdon says. "Fancy seeing you here. Do you ever spend time in your own room anymore?"

Robby shrugs, going back to his book. "Your room is closer to the washer and dryer."

Langdon rolls his eyes and climbs onto the bed, sitting cross-legged near the end of the bed, staring at Robby, the way the fabric of his sweatshirt hangs over the curve of his shoulders, the obvious strength in his calves.

"You're gonna burn a hole through me, the way you're staring,"

Robby says, not looking up.

“Well, you are in my bed. Hard not to.”

“Hm,” Robby says, smiling.

“Robby?”

“What’s up?”

He decides it’s best to just say it. “What are we doing?”

That makes Robby look up. He puts the book down, but he doesn’t say anything.

“I mean, you sleep with me every night, and we’re together all the time, and we have this thing that we haven’t talked about. Not once,” Langdon pushes forward. “Are we pretending this is casual? Because we know it’s not.”

Robby breathes in, a shadow passing over his face. “Langdon…”

“I’m not trying to force you into anything,” Langdon says quickly. “I just don’t know how much longer I can do this. Not when I feel so -”

“Please don’t,” Robby breathes, something in his voice saying he doesn’t actually mean it.

“Why?”

“If we keep having this conversation, I’m going to do something reckless,” Robby says, his voice hoarse.

Langdon blinks. “Like what?”

“Like kiss you. Touch you. Say something I shouldn’t say.”

Langdon feels a jolt low in his body. He moves toward Robby, slowly. “Maybe we should be a little reckless.”

“Langdon.”

“I keep thinking about it,” he murmurs, still moving toward Robby on the bed, watching Robby’s lips part. “It’s been a month and I can still feel your mouth on mine like it just happened.”

Robby licks his lips, pulls his bottom one between his teeth. Langdon

can't get enough.

"Do you think about it?"

"We shouldn't do this."

"Just tell me."

Langdon is right next to Robby now, their bodies inches away from each other. Langdon can feel the heat rolling off of Robby in waves.

"Every fucking day," Robby says, voice rough. "But we said we wouldn't."

" *You* said that. I just didn't argue."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I thought I could live with what you were giving me. But it turns out I can't." Langdon lets his voice drop lower. "I just want too much."

"Don't say shit like that," Robby says, but he shifts his hips toward Langdon, his eyes darkening.

"Let me kiss you."

"Frank."

Langdon watches Robby fight himself in real time, can see the tension in his body as he avoids leaning forward, the way his eyes stay on Langdon's mouth. He leans in, slowly, testing.

"Tell me not to," he says, his face so close to Robby's he can feel his breath. "Tell me to back off and I will. One word."

Robby's eyes slide closed. He doesn't say anything.

Langdon sits back on his heels and takes Robby's hand in his. He brings it to his mouth and brushes his lips against Robby's knuckles, more a question than a kiss. Robby's eyes open, and Langdon watches him swallow before he moves his hand to Langdon's jaw, running his fingers across it lightly and then letting them linger at the side of Langdon's neck. Langdon takes the signal. He leans in.

It's soft at first, hesitant, like they're both afraid the moment might disappear if they move too fast. And then Robby makes a noise –

something desperate from the back of his throat – and pulls Langdon closer, opening his mouth to him, and something in Langdon unravels. He digs his fingers into Robby's sweatshirt and pulls him down on top of him as they fall back onto the bed, legs tangled together on top of the sheets. The kiss deepens slowly, by degrees, both of them tasting each other like they need it, like they mean it. Langdon loosens his grip on Robby's sweatshirt, but he keeps his hand pressed to Robby's chest, needing to be close, needing to feel the shudder in Robby's ribcage when he gives into this.

Robby pulls away just enough to breathe against Langdon's lips. "I don't know if this is smart," he whispers.

Langdon slips his hand under Robby's sweatshirt, fingers brushing his waist with the lightest possible touch. "Don't run away again."

Robby smiles. "Oh, I'm not strong enough for that," he murmurs. "I've wanted to do this since the minute we stopped last time."

He sits up, leaning against the headboard again. Langdon feels a millisecond of panic before Robby reaches for his hand, pulling him up, adjusting him so that he's sitting on top of Robby, his knees bracketing Robby's thighs. "No further," he breathes, and it's not a question, but Langdon thinks that if he pushed, Robby could be convinced.

But there's time enough for that.

"No further," Langdon agrees, and then Robby's lips press against his again, still slow, but so sure now, warm and confident, and god, if Robby kissed him like this a month ago, Langdon would never have let him stop.

Robby's hands find Langdon's sides, palms flat against his ribcage, holding him steady, and Langdon cards one hand through Robby's hair while the other finds his waist again, drawing circles against his skin. Their mouths move in sync, Robby kissing him with a quiet desperation, wanting but not rushed. There's no urgency, just a quiet untangling, every brush of lips filling the need they've lived with all month.

They're quiet when they break apart, not saying anything while they both lay down, lying on their sides to face each other. Then, suddenly, Robby exhales a laugh, and Langdon laughs too, a little stunned and so unbelievably happy. Robby reaches for him, and he curls into Robby's body, laying his cheek on Robby's ribcage and letting him

trace lines up and down his spine.

“Why did we wait so long?” Langdon asks.

“You mean other than the fact that you’re in early recovery? And twenty years younger than me?”

“Yes.”

“And the fact that you’re married? And I’m your boss?”

“Yes,” Langdon says, looking up at Robby and smirking. “I meant aside from the obvious.”

“You want the real answer?”

“I do.”

“You scare the shit out of me.”

Langdon blinks, but he doesn’t say anything.

“When I said I’ve wanted to do this since last time I kissed you, I didn’t mean I just want to make out with you. I want all of it,” Robby continues.

“Then why stop?”

“Because all of it is… a lot.”

Langdon sighs. “Maybe we don’t need all of it at once.”

Robby chuckles. “I hate how easily you can do that.”

“Do what?”

“Just say something like that, make everything seem like it’s not a big deal when it is.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t a big deal. I just think we can find a way to make this work.”

“Come on,” Robby replies. “You know how hard this is gonna be.”

“Jesus, Robby, my whole *life* is hard right now,” Langdon says, shifting so he’s resting on his elbow so he can really look at Robby. “I have to talk about my addiction for hours every day, Abby’s divorce

lawyer is calling me constantly, I haven't seen my kids in months, I know everyone at work is talking about me, and I still crave benzos at least once a week. It's a slog. It's agony. But then there's you. And you hold me while you sleep, and you let me watch the world's worst television show because it's comforting to me, and you get in my bed to read like you belong here. You make me feel like… like I'm worth wanting, even with all this baggage. And yes, it's very hard to take this slow, because I want it all too, but if we don't do this, that's harder."

"You don't want to wait? In Al-Anon they talk about making sure someone isn't trading one addiction for another."

"This isn't an *addiction* . It's not like that. It's… safer."

"I just don't want to fuck with, like, the ethics of your recovery."

"Ah. A very strong moral stance for the guy that just rammed his tongue down his married resident's throat."

Robby laughs, pulls Langdon on top of him, wraps his arms around his waist. "Yeah, and I'm not waiting another month to do it again."

"I wasn't going to let you."

"We're not leaving this bed for the rest of the day," Robby purrs, kissing Langdon slowly, firm, certain.

And true to Robby's word, they don't.

Chapter 7

There are still meetings to go to, and breakthroughs to make with Sandra, and dishes to do, and patients to see. But there's also Robby, kissing him good morning, shooting him little smiles at work, murmuring about how beautiful Langdon is in the middle of the night. They agreed early on that they would wait for the physical aspect. Robby really wanted to take it slow, and Langdon had been a little spooked by Robby's "one addiction for another" comment. He heard it all the time in meetings: don't start a relationship until you're a year sober, you need to work on yourself first, on and on. And he knows that the advice is probably sound. The tiniest part of him is worried that they are being reckless, and not in a good way. But then Robby looks at him, his gaze all comfort and adoration, and Langdon immediately stops caring.

He is so deeply, unapologetically happy.

They have a pretty quiet life together: work, home, the gym. Langdon tells Robby more than once that he's okay to go out, he'll be fine at a bar, he can get a Sprite and still have a great time, but Robby is terrified of putting Langdon in a risky situation.

"Besides," he always says. "I want to keep you to myself."

It always makes Langdon smile, even when he feels like he's going stir crazy.

Suddenly, Langdon is almost five months sober, and the weather is really starting to turn, so cold it makes his bones hurt if he stands outside for more than two seconds. Thanksgiving is quickly approaching, and it's Robby who brings it up one day, laying in bed while Langdon sits next to him, his hand resting on Langdon's shin like it belongs there.

"I usually work on Thanksgiving," he says out of nowhere.

"Oh," Langdon says, looking up from his phone. "Uh…"

"I mean, I just wanted you to know. I'm not really a big holiday guy, and Thanksgiving is a pretty big day at work. A lot of idiots trying to fry turkeys."

"Yeah, that sounds fine. I'll work too."

Robby looks at him. “You will?”

Langdon nods. Truthfully, he’s been terrified of the holidays. It’s his first holiday season without his wife and kids. He tries to think about last Thanksgiving, but he’d taken too many Xanax to actually form memories, and he suddenly feels a ball of shame form in his chest. And it doesn’t really sound like Robby wants to change his habits for Langdon, which makes him anxious in a way he can’t describe.

Yeah. Best to just keep busy this year.

“Great,” Robby says. “I’m excited to spend the day with you.”

Langdon smiles, forcing his anxiety to quiet.

Soon Langdon realizes that when Robby says he’s “not a holiday guy,” he means “holidays make me irrationally angry and I hate every single second of them.” Two weeks before Thanksgiving, Robby becomes an actual menace at work, snapping at everyone, complaining about the stupidity of most of humanity, picking fights with Gloria. The last few years are a haze for Langdon, but he realizes that this has happened every holiday season. He can tell Mel and the interns are incredibly confused. He doesn’t know how to tell them that they’ll get used to it.

At home, Robby is in a slightly better mood, and Langdon knows instinctively not to push it. They’ll get home, fall into bed, and Langdon will ask, “Bad day?”

“Yeah,” Robby will say.

And Langdon will press his body to Robby’s, and Robby will kiss him hard, and they’ll tangle up together until Robby falls asleep with Langdon on his chest. Langdon knows better than to ask what’s putting him in a bad mood. He knows that’s not what Robby needs from him.

“Can you talk to Robby?” McKay asks him one day. “He’s being a complete asshole.”

“He’s being an asshole to everyone,” Langdon says. “You talk to him, if you think it’ll work.”

“It’s only going to work coming from you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

McKay rolls her eyes and storms off.

Twenty minutes later, Collins finds him after he talks to a patient. “We’re getting a drink after work.”

“Who?”

“You and me. We need to chat.”

Robby looks scared when Langdon tells him, but Langdon reminds him that he can trust Collins, and he’s been sober for months. They meet at a hole in the wall near the hospital.

“Yuengling,” Collins says, and she looks at Langdon to order.

“Can I get a Sprite and pineapple juice?” Langdon asks.

“I think you’re the first person over the age of seventeen who’s ever ordered that,” Collins says as they find a table.

“This is a *dive* , Collins. You think they’re going to have a premium selection of non-alcoholic spirits? Please.”

Collins smiles, takes a sip of her beer, then says, “So.”

“So.”

“Alright, I’ll cut to the chase. Talk to your man.”

Langdon groans. “Are you serious?”

“He’s being a dick, Langdon. He’s making everyone miserable.”

“Didn’t you date him around the holidays? You couldn’t talk him out of his moods.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think we had the same dynamic that you two do.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That he and I had fun, but he’s got it bad for you. Like, bad.”

Langdon sips his drink. It tastes terrible. “I mean, we like each other. But I don’t know if he’s got it bad for me.”

“He follows you around all day with these insane puppy dog eyes. He

spares you from his insane moods."

"He does not."

"When was the last time he yelled at you?"

Langdon sips his horrible drink again, mostly so he can avoid the question, because the answer is *I don't remember* .

"Yeah," Collins says, her point proven.

"Look, I'll try, but I'm not making any promises. He's always like this at the end of the year."

"Yeah, but now we've got someone on the inside."

Langdon narrows his eyes. "Who's 'we'?"

Collins gives him a look. "Langdon."

The realization hits him in the face. "Oh my god. Does everyone know?"

"No one *knows* , but yes, everyone is talking about it."

"I thought we were being careful."

"The previously-mentioned puppy dog eyes are pretty obvious. Plus, you know, you're roommates, he gives you special treatment, it was bound to be a topic of discussion. Everyone in The Pitt is starved for gossip. And unbelievably horny. The two hottest guys in the ED getting together? That's a big fucking deal."

"I guess so," Langdon laughs.

"So, how is it? I have to know," Collins says, a smile Langdon can't interpret playing on her lips.

"How's what?"

"Come on." She drops her voice to a whisper. "The sex! He's really attentive, right?"

Langdon chokes on his drink.

"Sorry," Collins says, still smiling. "I just figured since we've hooked up with the same guy, our friendship can hit a new level."

“We haven’t hooked up,” Langdon blurts.

Collins doesn’t lose her smile, but her eyes widen. “What?”

“We haven’t had sex. We just make out. He hasn’t even touched me.”

Collins starts laughing. “Oh my god,” she says through giggles. “He’s got it *bad* .”

They’re off the next two days. The next day, they go to the grocery store (which Langdon still hates, but it’s better with his hand in Robby’s), then go home to do laundry and clean, stopping once for Robby to press Langdon against a wall and kiss him like he’s starving. In the evening, they find themselves on the couch in their usual positions: Langdon laying on his back on the couch with his head in Robby’s lap, Robby running his fingers through Langdon’s hair. They both feel Robby’s phone vibrate in his jeans, and he pulls it out to check his texts.

He groans. “Abbot wants to get a drink with me tonight. I think he’s going to chew me out for being so shitty to everyone.”

“I wouldn’t say shitty,” Langdon replies. “Just… intense.”

“I would use the word focused.”

“Well, I would use the word insufferable.”

Robby looks down at him. “Tell me how you really feel.”

“I just thought the mood was right for unsolicited feedback. Plus, you said shitty.”

“I’m just identifying everyone’s very incorrect opinion of me.”

“Robby, two days ago you told one of the nurses to ‘find a new profession’ because she didn’t get a blood draw on the first stick. It’s, like, her second week.”

“She missed three times.”

“You told a computer to eat shit.”

“It was frozen. Gloria won’t give us the money to –“

“Hey,” Langdon says, voice soft. “You’ve got kind of a bad attitude at work right now. Around the holidays. That sorta sucks for people. I

don't really know what's going on, but you have to chill."

Robby sighs. "You know I don't let anyone else talk to me like this."

"I do know that. But you let me talk to you like this because I'm very charming and emotionally mature. Sandra has taught me so much."

"Yeah," Robby says, cupping Langdon's jaw. "Plus I feel so safe here."

"You are. You know you can talk to me about anything."

"I just don't know what to say," Robby whispers.

"Well, while you're figuring it out, maybe try not to scare the interns."

"They're so *soft* ."

Langdon kisses Robby's hand. "So are you, Robby."

Robby hums, smiles. There's such peace here, so much comfort.

And then Langdon opens his mouth.

"You know," he says, teasing, "I heard a very interesting bit of gossip last night."

Robby tenses. "Please don't tell me this is going where I think it's going."

"About a very cranky attending and a very attractive resident."

"People need to mind their business," Robby says too quickly.

Langdon sits up. "O…kay. That's not the reaction I was expecting."

Robby turns to him, jaw set. "What were you expecting?"

"I guess I was expecting you to think it was funny. I mean, we haven't been subtle, exactly."

"I thought we were being subtle."

"Are you… actually mad about this?"

"I just don't want to be the subject of gossip."

Langdon rolls his eyes. "People talk all the time. And you're ignoring the fact that this time they're not wrong."

“I don’t need this getting around my ED before we even have a handle on what this is!”

Langdon scoffs.

“What?” Robby snaps.

“Oh, nothing. I’m just trying not to take it personally that I make you so fucking uncomfortable.”

“You don’t make me uncomfortable.”

“Then why can’t you just own this? Why are you hiding me?”

“The last, actual *last* thing I need is for everyone to think I’m giving one of my residents special treatment because we’re together. You want Gloria breathing down our necks? HR?”

Langdon presses his lips into a thin line. “I get it. You’re scared of me.”

“I’m not scared of you, Frank. But don’t you see how this is a liability? If people start talking, really talking, we’re fucked.”

“I’m *already fucked* , Robby! I’m already the drug addicted doctor that can’t write prescriptions for another six months. I’m already the resident that’s living with his boss. I am already a liability! This being an open secret just makes things worse for me.”

“We agreed to take things slow!”

“I didn’t agree to be a side character in your life!”

“Why are you making this so fucking complicated?” Robby asked, practically growling.

“I’m not. *You’re* making it complicated because you can’t fucking stand that this could be a normal, easy relationship.”

“It’s not! It’s not normal and it’s not easy and you can’t just act like it is!”

“Wow,” Langdon says flatly.

Robby’s eyes widen. “I - didn’t mean that,”

“No, it’s fine. You think I’m inconvenient for you. I understand.”

“No I don’t. I swear I didn’t mean -”

“Then what *did* you mean?” Langdon interrupts. “Because you never fucking *say* what you mean. You never say anything. You just sit there and sulk and expect me to read your mind and make it better. I mean, Jesus, I was *joking* . And now all of a sudden this isn’t easy? Fuck off.”

Robby’s eyes are dark. Langdon watches him chew on the inside of his cheek and look away. “I have to meet Abbot,” he says, his voice low.

“Are you kidding me? You’re mad? Why, because I called you out?”

“Because I’m not always the goddamn bad guy,” Robby snaps, standing up and grabbing his coat. “‘Robby, don’t be so rude to Gloria.’ ‘Robby, don’t be such a dick to your staff.’ ‘Robby, you’re putting too much on Langdon.’ Can everyone just get the fuck off my back?”

Langdon stares at him.

“Stay up or don’t, I don’t care. I’m probably going to be late. Abbot loves to talk my ear off about what an asshole I am.”

He bangs the door when he leaves. Langdon sits on the couch for a second, stunned.

All couples fight, he reminds himself. Especially while they’re trying to figure out what they are. And they’re clearly a couple. So it’s fine.

Or it would be, if Robby wasn’t such a massive asshole.

Langdon is exhausted. Dealing with Robby’s brooding, having to initiate all the hard conversations, not taking pills, it’s all made for a tough few weeks. He won’t be able to sleep, but he just wants today to be over. Tomorrow will probably be better.

He crawls into bed and scrolls on his phone for an hour or two. When he’s looked at every high school friend’s Instagram, he closes his phone and looks up at the ceiling. He’s past willing sleep to come - he’s accepted that he’ll doze off or he won’t. So he just focuses on his breath, tries to quiet his brain.

He hears the front door open. Unsteady footsteps in the hall. A knock - first too quiet, then too loud.

Well, this should be fun.

“When was the last time you knocked on my door?” Langdon calls.

Robby opens the door and leans against the doorframe. He looks just a little off, his hair a little messy, his lean a little too intense. “I feel stupid about earlier,” he says.

“What an eloquent apology.”

“I’m *sorry* ,” Robby says, walking into the room, a heaviness in his gait. He sits on the bed and Langdon watches as he struggles to pull off his shoes.

“Had a little to drink?”

“Abbot can drink like a fish.”

“And you?”

Robby finally gets his shoes off, he collapses into bed, fully clothed, and smiles lopsidedly at Langdon. “Maybe not like a fish.” He rolls over so he’s facing Langdon and kisses his bicep. “I am sorry,” he says. “I hate when you’re mad.”

“Ah, I’m not that mad anymore. I just want you to be able to trust me. To tell me what you need.”

Robby snakes an arm around Langdon’s waist. “I just need this. You.”

“Did Abbot talk some sense into you, at least?”

“He tried. But I couldn’t stop thinking about you. It was distracting.”

Langdon tenses, just a little, as Robby places an open-mouthed kiss on his jaw.

“Careful,” Langdon whispers.

“I don’t want to be careful tonight,” Robby murmurs. He pushes up on his arm so that he’s leaning above Langdon, drinking him in, something hungry in his eyes. “It would be so easy if we – we could. Right now.”

Langdon’s breath catches in his throat. “Since when are you okay with easy?”

Robby’s hand finds Langdon’s side under the blanket, then drags down until Robby’s palm is pressed against Langdon’s thigh. Langdon

shudders at the contact.

“I could be so good to you. Make us both forget why we ever fought,” Robby breathes, and his words wrap around Langdon’s spine, pooling in his lower back. He closes his eyes.

“You’re drunk,” he says, but it’s weak.

“I’m tipsy. Doesn’t mean I’m lying.”

“Robby, you know this isn’t the way you want to do this.”

“Who says?” He presses his chest to Langdon’s, breath hot against his ear, and groans, “Let your guard down.”

Langdon doesn’t mean to moan, but he does. He instinctively wraps his arm around Robby’s waist, grabbing a handful of Robby’s shirt. His whole body is flushed, heat pulsing through him as he feels Robby hard against his leg. He could. God, he wants to. He wants to be taken care of. He wants this. But he knows the right thing here.

“If you touch me right now, you’ll regret it tomorrow,” he says. “I want you so bad. But I want you sober.”

Robby lets his forehead drop on Langdon’s collarbone. “Fuck,” he says, his voice rough. “I really wish you were wrong.”

Langdon presses his hand to the back of Robby’s neck. “Me too,” he whispers.

“Can I still sleep in here?”

“I genuinely can’t remember the last time you slept in your own room.”

Robby looks up at Langdon and smiles. He gets out of bed to pull of his jeans, and Langdon has to turn away from him to keep his resolve. He feels Robby settle back into bed, pressing his chest to Langdon’s back.

“You’re shaking,” Robby mumbles against Langdon’s skin. Langdon realizes he is.

“I’d let you,” he whispers, so quiet he’s not sure if Robby can hear. “You know I’d let you do anything you wanted to me. Just not tonight.”

“When you let me,” Robby says, low and sure, “I’m going to take my time. I’m going to take care of you.”

Langdon barely sleeps. His pulse is too loud in his ears.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He feels Robby shift against him around 10 am, which is late for both of them, but Langdon hasn't dared to move. He can feel the heat of last night in every muscle, in the simmering of his blood. He knows Robby wasn't trashed last night, but he also wasn't sober, and there's no telling what Robby will forget, or at least pretend to.

"Oh my god," Robby mumbles, voice still thick with sleep. "Oh my *god* ."

"You gonna be okay?" Langdon asks, keeping his voice steady. "Or do I need to arrange for an exorcism?"

"Langdon, I'm Jewish."

"Right. Plus we're also living in sin. I don't think a priest would like us very much."

"Why is it so bright in here?" Robby groans. Langdon shifts to face him.

"That, my dear, is called the sun, and I can't do anything about it. Seriously, are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I just need to lay here and complain for, like, five minutes."

"I have never seen you like this."

"Yeah, I don't make a habit of showing up to work hungover."

"Fair," Langdon says. He forgets sometimes that there was a time when he wasn't spending all hours of the day with Robby.

"I'm going to go take a shower with the lights off. Hopefully that will bring me back to life."

"Sounds good," Langdon says, fighting a quiet desperation. He doesn't know if Robby doesn't remember or just doesn't want to talk about it, but neither scenario works for him. He watches Robby leave, the things he said last night pounding in his head, the way his hand felt

on Langdon's thigh, firm and sure.

He decides it was supremely stupid of him to turn it down. They may have regretted it this morning, But Langdon really thinks it would have been worth it.

He hasn't moved out of bed by the time Robby comes back. He's been busy picturing strong hands and full lips and a very particular growl. He's halfway to touching himself when he hears his door open. He sits up, shocked out of his thoughts by the sound.

"No need for the exorcism," Robby says. "I got rid of the demon on my own. All it took was a cold shower and, like, six Tylenol."

"A massive amount of alcohol and a massive amount of Tylenol? Remind me to check your liver function tomorrow at work."

"It's seen worse." Robby sits on the bed next to Langdon, hair still damp from the shower, threadbare tee shirt clinging to his shoulders and pecs in a way that Langdon personally finds deeply unfair. "Hey," he says.

"Hey yourself."

"I wanted to apologize about last night. I shouldn't have pushed like that."

Langdon blushes. "You weren't exactly subtle."

Robby laughs. "Yeah, that's for sure. I was out of line. It wasn't fair."

Langdon swallows. "Did you mean it?" he asks.

Something changes behind Robby's eyes. "Yeah, of course I did."

Langdon bites his lip, then asks, "Do you still?"

Robby's mouth tilts into a small smile. "What, in the cold light of day? Frank, you have no fucking idea."

Langdon lets out a shaky breath. Robby adjusts so that he's closer, achingly close, to Langdon's body, bracing himself with a hand right next to Langdon's thigh. "What it would feel like to touch you, the sounds you'd make, the way you'd look underneath me? You don't know how many nights I've slept next to you thinking about it, dreaming about it. Yeah, I want you."

Langdon slides down the bed until he's lying on his back. The cotton of the sheets suddenly feels heavenly against his skin. He reaches for Robby's wrist, running his thumb lightly along the pulse point. Robby looks down at his wrist, then into Langdon's eyes, his smile deepening, his eyes full of need.

"I want you soft," he continues, reaching his free hand under the blanket to trace the dip of Langdon's pelvic bone. "Undone. Not worried about any of the shit that you have to carry around all the time. Taken care of."

"Robby." Langdon's not sure if it's a warning or an invitation.

"We've been holding our breath for so long, baby," Robby whispers, still massaging Langdon's hip. The pet name shoots through his chest. "Breathe with me."

" *Robby* ," Langdon moans, and now it's definitely an invitation. Robby can tell, and he takes the hint.

Robby leans over Langdon to kiss just underneath his ribs, still massaging his hip. "Let me take care of you," he whispers. He kisses Langdon's collarbone next. "I can make you feel so, so good." Then he kisses the corner of Langdon's mouth, his lips brushing against Langon's as he purrs, "Baby, please."

Langdon whines, high and dirty. His whole body is thrumming, his insides pulled taut under Robby's hands, dying for more.

"You're tense," Robby says, a smile in his voice as he grips Langdon's hip harder. "I can feel it."

Langdon turns his head and Robby immediately catches his mouth in a kiss.

Langdon lets his eyes flutter shut, lets his hand drift to Robby's waist, pushing past the hem of his shirt. Robby licks into Langdon's mouth, pulling him by the hip so their chests press together.

Langdon pulls away, almost out of breath. "You're very confident."

Robby smiles, brushing his hand up Langdon's side to rest on his cheek. "I just don't want you to worry."

"About what?"

“About anything. You don’t have to earn this or prove anything. Just let me want you.”

“I haven’t done this in… a long time. Years.”

Robby hums, kissing Langdon’s cheek. “Med school?”

Langdon’s breath shudders out of him. “Undergrad, I think.”

“Okay,” Robby says, kissing Langdon’s neck. “I’ve got you.”

And the way he’s saying this, the way he’s begging to take care of Langdon, the safety Langdon feels with Robby’s mouth against him, is so delicious, so fucking *hot* . He’s tired of waiting. Tired of making sure. He lets himself slip into wanting. He knows Robby will be there to catch him.

He takes Robby’s face in his hands and kisses him hard, teeth clashing as he pushes between Robby’s lips. He swallows Robby’s moan as Robby adjusts him so that he’s flat on the bed and kicks the sheet onto the floor.

He pulls away from Robby’s mouth just enough to groan “Off,” pulling at his shirt.

Robby laughs and pulls his shirt off quickly, diving back in to kiss Langdon some more, his hands roaming Langdon’s chest like he’s trying to memorize the feeling, every line and curve. Langdon moves his hand slowly to Robby’s stomach and drags his fingers down, hesitating at the waistband of Robby’s sweats. Robby’s breath hitches and he moves his face to the side of Langdon’s head.

“Go ahead,” he says against Langdon’s temple. “Touch me.”

Langdon slips his hand into Robby’s sweats, feeling like he’s in a dream. The sound Robby makes when Langdon grazes his fingers against his cock, deep and primal, pulls him out of his haze. He grips Robby just this side of too hard, kissing him roughly, suddenly impatient.

“Fuck,” Robby grunts. “I knew this would feel good but, fuck.”

Langdon laughs quietly. “I’ve touched you for half a second.”

“Yeah, and I’m already seeing stars. You good?”

“More than good,” Langdon whispers, running his thumb lightly along

Robby's tip. He begins working Robby slowly, with as much restraint as he can muster. Robby crushes his mouth onto Robby's, goraning on every upstroke, letting Langdon swallow the noise. Soon, Robby is rolling his hips into Langdon's hand, fucking into Langdon's mouth with his tongue. Langdon pushes Robby's sweats down without breaking the kiss until Robby's cock is fully exposed. He wants a better angle, he wants to give Robby more, anything he wants, all of him. Robby gasps into the kiss before he pulls away, tightening his grip on Langdon's waist. His eyes are dark, all his features somehow sharper.

"Don't," he manages, his chest heaving. "Slow down."

Langdon loosens his grip, trying not to worry. Robby notices his expression and exhales a laugh. "I just want this to last. I just want you so much."

Langdon smiles. Robby smiles too, something wicked in it, and shifts to pull his sweats off. Langdon swallows at the sight of Robby completely naked over him, strong and broad. He can't remember how long he's wanted this, but it feels like a lifetime. He runs his hands up Robby's arms.

"Is it completely inappropriate to say I wanted to see you like this when I was married?" he blurts, his dick fully taking control of his brain.

Robby laughs. "Maybe, but I think we're past caring about what's appropriate. Besides," he murmurs, leaning down to kiss at Langdon's neck, his touch so light it's dizzying, "I've wanted you in my bed for years."

Langdon melts into the bed as Robby kisses down his shoulder and collarbone, then moves to his chest, dragging his tongue down his torso, stopping at his belly button.

"You're so fucking hot," he says against Langdon's stomach, palming Langdon's erection through his pajama pants. "And you're all mine."

"All yours," Langdon breathes, his eyes slipping shut at the contact.

Robby tugs at the waistband of Langdon's pajamas, and something makes him tense for half a second, but he relaxes again as Robby pulls down. This is *Robby* , he reminds himself. There's nothing to worry about.

He feels exposed and a little nervous in spite of himself. He is so hard, leaking precome like a fifteen year old. But he has no time to think about it, because as soon as Robby has his pants off he's taking him in his mouth, sucking lightly at the tip of Langdon's cock.

"Shit," Langdon bites out, gripping the sheets. Robby responds by gripping his hips, keeping him still while he slowly takes all of him. Langdon whines when his dick hits the back of Robby's throat. Robby hums, and the vibration is insane, but not nearly as satisfying as when Robby swallows around him. He moans, pushing against Robby's hold.

"I know you want to take care of me," Langdon says between measured breaths, "But I'm not fragile."

Robby pulls off of Langdon's dick with a *smack* that is so dirty Langdon could come just from the sound. He squirms under Robby's hands. Robby leans over him. "You want more?"

"I told you last night, you can do whatever you want to me."

Robby kisses Langdon fiercely, desperately, and then suddenly his mouth is on Langdon's cock again, warm and wet, moving fast, pressing his tongue against the shaft. Langdon feels himself dissolve, every muscle in his body relaxing, his brain focused on nothing but Robby's mouth, the way he hollows out his cheeks to suck, the way his throat constricts. He never really thought much about the fact that Robby is so much older than him, but right now it shows. He has so much experience, so much confidence. He knows exactly what to do to Langdon, and Langdon can't get enough.

His hand finds the back of Robby's head, fingers slipping through his hair. Robby hums his approval. Langdon doesn't recognize the sounds coming out of him, the way he whines and moans, totally caught up in the sensation. He lets himself look down at the same moment that Robby takes all of him, and the sight of him completely buried in Robby's mouth is almost too much. He pulls Robby's hair.

Robby comes off of him again, smiling. "A little assertive, are we?"

"I just needed you to stop. If you went thirty more seconds, I was going to come in your mouth."

Something hungry flashes behind Robby's eyes. "That wouldn't be such a bad thing," he rasps.

Langdon can see what he was doing to Robby, and it's intoxicating. He

pulls Robby in for a messy kiss. “But I want you to fuck me first,” he murmurs when he pulls away, watching Robby’s face change at the intensity of the statement.

“That was… very direct,” Robby says, licking his lips.

“You said you didn’t want to wait anymore. Neither do I.”

Robby groans. “Do you have lube in here?”

“Shit, no.”

“Give me a minute,” Robby says, and he climbs out of bed and leaves the room. Langdon feels the loss like an ache. He is so turned on. It makes him restless. He squeezes his eyes shut to try to calm down, then he touches himself, chasing the feeling that he gets with Robby, dying to feel good.

His eyes are still shut when Robby comes in. He feels him climb back onto the bed.

“You *are* impatient,” Robby growls, and he wraps a hand around Langdon’s cock. Langdon lets go and opens his eyes just in time to watch Robby spit on him, spreading the saliva and precome with his thumb before working him quickly, his wrist twisting in this particular way that makes Langdon’s brain short-circuit.

“Still good?” Robby gasps, and Langdon is past being able to talk, so he just nods, and then he feels Robby’s finger pressing against him, cold with lube. His breath catches.

“Breathe,” Robby whispers, as if Langdon had any control over his breathing with Robby touching him like this. Robby presses into him. “Oh fuck,” he groans, dropping his head on Langdon’s chest. “You’re so fucking tight.”

“Robby,” Langdon says, so breathy he’s not even sure if Robby hears him. It feels so good, the stretch of it competing with the way Robby is still working his dick. Langdon can barely form a thought past raw desire.

Robby adds another finger, pressing a little deeper, and Langdon cries out, entirely too loud, too far gone to be embarrassed. Robby matches his rhythm with the rhythm of his fist, and it’s almost too much to take, but Langdon will *not* let himself come, because he will not stop feeling like this. Robby starts stretching Langdon with his fingers, the

pull of it making him feel so full. He shifts his hips, begging for more, for Robby to go deeper, for more sensation.

“Baby,” Robby whispers, kissing Robby’s abdomen, “if I don’t fuck you right now I’m going to go insane.”

“Fuck me,” Langdon responds, his voice high and tight, almost unrecognizable.

Robby pulls his fingers out and grabs the lube. Watching Robby spread it over himself is its own kind of foreplay. Seeing Robby prep himself, knowing that he’s seconds away from taking Robby, makes him buzz.

“Alright,” Robby says, discarding the lube and settling between Langdon’s legs. He suddenly looks nervous.

“Hey,” Langdon breathes, pushing himself up on his elbows to run his hand on Robby’s cheek. “All good?”

“I just want this to be good for you,” Robby says quietly.

“I trust you,” Langdon whispers. “I want you.” He’s never meant anything more in his life.

Robby smiles. He takes one of Langdon’s ankles and puts it on his shoulder. Langdon collapses back on the bed, body on fire, keeping his eyes on Robby as he lines his hips up with Langdon.

When Robby is right up against him, he looks at Langdon, hungry and sure. “Yeah?” he breathes.

“Yeah.”

Robby slowly pushes in. Langdon immediately tenses, and Robby stops, kisses his ankle. “Hey, I’ve got you,” he says, warm and a little possessive, and Langdon relaxes. Robby grabs onto Langdon’s hips and presses further, slowly but not stopping. Langdon gives himself over to the pull of it, a little painful but so delicious. Robby stops again when he’s completely inside him, groaning. Langdon arches his back.“Come on,” he bites out.

Robby takes the hint and slides out and then back in slowly, rolling his hips deliberately, with restraint. “Jesus,” he gasps.

“More,” Langdon moans. His thighs are shaking, and he’s got his hand

on his dick, squeezing to stave off an orgasm. “I need you, Robby. I need more.”

“ *Jesus* , baby,” Robby groans, and he finally lets go, thrusting into him hard and deep, his breath heavy. Langdon’s eyes roll into the back of his head as he grinds into Robby as much as he can with Robby’s hands keeping him steady. There’s still the slightest hint of a burn, but it feels so good. It’s intoxicating to be wrecked like this.

Langdon can’t help the way he moans, the pleas pouring out of him, begging Robby to keep going, not to stop. Robby seems only too happy to oblige, his nails digging into Langdon’s skin as he fucks him. “I can’t get enough of you,” Robby rasps, his voice raw, and he turns his head to bite at Langdon’s ankle. Langdon whimpers, tensing as he starts to work himself almost involuntarily. He arches his back again, just as Robby slams deep into him, and he sees stars when Robby hits his prostate.

Robby hums and adjusts his hold on Langdon so he can keep thrusting at the right angle, hitting his prostate over and over again, and Langdon keeps tensing, his body feeling so full and so tight, and then he’s coming, Robby’s name in his mouth, his vision whiting out, hips bucking wildly, clenching around Robby. Robby fucks him through it, murmuring, “Yeah, just like that, baby, you look so good. I got you, baby, come on.”

Langdon is happy to lay here and let Robby push into him as long as he needs. But Robby’s movements quickly become jerkier, harder, and then he comes too, letting Langdon’s leg fall from his shoulder so he can lean over Langdon, eyes squeezed shut, skin slick with sweat. Langdon gasps at the feeling, reaching a hand to the back of Robby’s neck as he finishes.

He pulls out and collapses next to Langdon, his eyes closed. He takes hold of Langdon’s wrist as they catch their breath side by side.

“Wow,” Langdon says after a minute, and then he laughs, because what a ridiculous reaction to sex, and Robby laughs too. They laugh for a while, in a comfortable state of disbelief. Robby turns his body to Langdon’s.

“Was that… as big a deal for you as it was for me?”

“Well, that’s the first time I’ve been fucked since I was 20, so yeah, kind of a big deal.”

“You know what I mean.”

Langdon looks at Robby and is shocked at the vulnerability in his eyes. “Yeah,” he says. “Of course it was.”

“Good,” Robby whispers, tracing Langdon’s jaw with his finger. “Because I can’t remember the last time I’ve wanted something this much.”

“Robby,” Langdon says. “I want this so badly. You make me feel like… like I’m allowed to want things.”

“You are.”

Langdon leans into Robby’s touch. “Thanks.”

Robby leans off of the bed to grab his tee shirt. He cleans Langdon up slowly, his expression warm and raw, and it does something to Langdon’s heart. He catches Robby’s wrist.

“I am so serious about this,” Langdon says. “I promise. I’m here. For real.”

Robby smiles. “Me too. For real.”

After he cleans himself up, he settles back down next to Langdon and pulls him into his regular position, with his head on Robby’s chest and his thigh over Robby’s legs, Robby’s arms around his waist. They’re quiet for a minute, and Langdon thinks he could probably doze off.

“I always work holidays because I hate them,” Robby says suddenly, like it’s a secret. “Because I’m usually alone for them, and I’m usually on call, which means I’ll almost definitely have to go into work to deal with the pinnacle of human stupidity. So it’s always felt safer to just ignore them. To treat them like any other day.” He hesitates, then continues, “Only now, it feels safer to do this with you. To commit to this.”

Langdon wraps his arm tight around Robby’s stomach. “Honestly, I’m not a holiday person either. They’re a mess of obligations, and I’ve been high for the last two Thanksgivings and Christmases. But I like the idea of spending the holidays with you. We can make them brand new.”

“I feel brand new right now,” Robby murmurs.

“Me too,” Langdon replies.

Chapter End Notes

Hi hello I am sorry it took so long for an update but I ended up writing two chapters instead of one. So if you think about, I did a public service. You're all welcome.

Chapter 9

They fall asleep tangled together. Langdon is able to take an actual nap for the first time in months. They wake up in the late afternoon and immediately have sex again. They don't put clothes on for the rest of the day, and they sleep naked, holding tight to each other.

They wake up naturally the next morning, and Robby fucks Langdon while they're spooning, hard but slow, hand lightly around his throat, teeth in his shoulder. They're a half hour late to work. Abbot gives them both a death stare before debriefing with Robby.

"Very subtle," Collins says, coming up next to Langdon to look at the board with him.

"We got stuck in traffic."

"You live five minutes away. And your mouths are swollen."

Langdon scoffs.

"So," Collins whispers, that grin spreading across her face again. "What'd I say? Attentive."

Langdon beams. "Very."

Langdon has never gotten more action or more unassisted sleep than he does in the week before Thanksgiving. He's pretty sure those two things are connected. Robby's insatiable and very talented. Talented in the way that makes Langdon consider writing a thank-you note to whoever taught him, which he would definitely do if he wasn't irrationally jealous at the idea of anyone before him.

They haven't slipped up at work, somehow. The eye contact is longer, sure, and Langdon has noticed a disturbing lack of personal space when they're in the same room. But they're not sneaking off to hook up in a supply closet, so technically, they're still professionals. Barely.

Not that Langdon doesn't think about it. He thinks about it a lot. Judging by the way Robby pushes him against the wall the second they get home like the only thing between them and spontaneous combustion is a few layers of clothing, Robby's thinking about it too.

Christmas comes and goes quietly. They volunteer to work the holiday and skip gifts. They make a bet over whether they'll see more cooking-

related injuries (Robby's) or Christmas-present disasters (Langdon's). Langdon wins in the final hour when a teenager wipes out on his brand-new motorized scooter and earns himself a mild concussion. Dinner is Langdon's choice— ramen from the hole-in-the-wall place that probably violates several health codes—and his pick for post-shift entertainment: two episodes of House Hunters and a blowjob that makes his knees weak. Merry Christmas indeed.

But after the holidays, something shifts. Or maybe it doesn't shift—maybe it was always there and Langdon's just noticing it now. Robby is hovering again. Always watching. Always there. And at first it's kind of sweet, in a slightly overbearing, bodyguard-with-a-control-problem kind of way. But then the apartment starts to feel smaller, and the snowstorms start to roll in, and suddenly it's just the two of them in 700 square feet of tension and lukewarm leftovers.

Since they live walking distance from the hospital, they cover every shift no one else can get to. And when they're not working, they're inside the apartment, eating the same food, watching the same shows. They both prefer working out outside, which is not possible in a Pittsburg winter. So instead, Langdon spends a lot of time feeling Robby's eyes on him. All the time. Like he's being studied. Evaluated. Babysat.

He brings it up to Sandra. She gives him that therapist look and tells him this is normal. "There's a moment in recovery," she says, "where life stops being new and starts being just… life. That's when it gets hard."

"Thrilling," Langdon mutters.

She also talks a lot about how lack of vitamin D can make people feel depressed, as if Langdon is not a doctor and has never heard of Seasonal Affective Disorder. She recommends a sun lamp. Emails a few options. He reads the email and then closes it without clicking the links.

Instead, he focuses on the one thing that still makes him feel grounded: sex. Or, more specifically, the way Robby looks at him when they're in bed. The way Robby touches him. The way everything else disappears when he's being held, taken care of. It's the one part of their life that isn't routine. It makes him delirious. He wants it all the time. It's intoxicating.

It also makes it easier not to think about the fact that Robby still

hasn't called him his boyfriend. Or told anyone. Or stopped monitoring his every move under the guise of concern. None of it really matters when Robby's inside him, when Langdon's pressed into the mattress and gasping and finally, finally not thinking. Not remembering. Not worrying. When Robby moves like that, when he says *I've got you*, Langdon almost believes it.

But even that isn't enough to keep the unease at bay.

In early February, they're tangled up in bed. Robby is half-asleep, his hand warm and heavy over Langdon's stomach. Langdon's trying to read one of Robby's Hemingway novels—because he told himself he'd read more this year, and because Robby looks so hot when he reads that it seemed like a good idea at the time.

He's on page four. He's read the same paragraph five times. His resolution is… not very successful.

Then his phone rings. He's thankful for the distraction until he glances at the caller ID. His stomach clenches. He sends it to voicemail.

"Who was it?" Robby mumbles, his eyes still closed.

"Just Abby's lawyer."

"Didn't think it would be important?"

"If it's important, he'll leave a voicemail. My guess is that he's asking yet again whether I have my own attorney, and I don't feel like telling him yet again that I don't."

Robby opens his eyes, the sleep completely gone from his face and voice. "You don't have an attorney?"

Langdon's heart drops into his stomach. He shrugs. "No," he says, sounding remarkably cool for a guy who absolutely needed to get an attorney four months ago and feels a constant pull of guilt that he hasn't.

"Why?" Robby is incredulous.

"I don't know," Langdon says, because it sounds better than I'm lazy and avoidant. "I'm just more focused on my recovery, I guess."

"But you're getting a divorce?"

Langdon looks Robby in the eyes. "Yes? What makes you ask that?"

“You generally need an attorney to get a divorce. And you don’t have one. And you’re screening calls from Abby’s. It just seems…” Robby hesitates.

Once he understands, Langdon barks out a laugh. “You think that I’m trying to avoid getting a divorce?”

Robby is silent.

“Come on, Robby. No.”

“I know you didn’t want to end things.”

“Well, no, but that’s what’s happening. I mean, she left. The kids are in school in Connecticut. I’m not getting that life back. I’m not trying to hold onto it.”

“Okay,” Robby says quietly, clearly unconvinced.

“Robby.” Langdon grabs Robby’s hand. “I like you. I care about you. And I like this. I’m not trying to leave this. We can’t even get divorced until we’ve lived separately for six months. I still have a little time. I’m sorry I haven’t gotten one yet. I’ll get one soon. Promise.”

Robby squeezes Langdon’s hand. “Yeah. Okay. I care about you, and I like this too.”

Langdon smiles. He thinks it’s over, but Robby starts asking him once a week about a divorce attorney until he finally gets one a month later. It should feel like a relief, and maybe it would if Langdon thought it was his decision to get one, but mostly he just feels like Robby nagged him until he did what Robby wanted. Which honestly feels kind of shitty. It feels like Robby won a game Langdon wasn’t interested in playing.

It goes on like this for another month or so, a familiar tension filling the apartment, neither one of them willing to acknowledge it, both of them pretending everything is normal, the walls of the apartment closing in inch by inch. One night, Langdon is lacing up his shoes by the front door, and Robby comes up to him, leaning suspiciously casually on the wall.

“Meeting?” Robby asks.

“Yeah.”

“I’ll go with you,” he says, like it’s a casual request. Langdon feels his entire body tense.

“Um.”

“It’s an open meeting, right? I’d like to go.”

“How’d you know it was an open meeting?”

“I checked.”

“You… checked.”

“Yes? Does that bother you?”

“I mean, the meetings are…” Langdon struggles to find a nice way to say “the only thing I have left that’s mine.”

“I’m just trying to be supportive,” Robby says, defensive.

“I don’t want you to go,” Langdon blurts, knowing he needs to say it and already dreading the fallout.

And the fallout is swift. “You don’t want me to go. Okay. Good talk.”

“It’s not personal,” Langdon says quickly.

“Oh, no?” Robby scoffs.

“Come on, Robby. That’s like… sitting in my therapy sessions. I need to be able to be open there.”

“So you can be open with a room full of strangers, but you can’t be open with me?”

“No. You’re twisting my words. I just want to be vulnerable without worrying –“

“You’re worried about being vulnerable in front of me?”

“No! Well, I don’t know. A little bit, maybe. I just don’t want you to see me any differently.”

“You want to talk about trust, but how am I supposed to trust you if you won’t be open with me?”

“Robby, you have access to my whole life.”

“Apparently not.”

Langdon narrows his eyes and takes a breath. “Is this about the lawyer?”

Robby clenches his jaw. “What do you mean.”

“The lawyer. That’s what this is about, right? I was on it, Robby. It’s my fucking divorce, it has nothing to do with you.”

“It has everything to do with me! With us! You have to be an idiot not to see that. It’s like you don’t take this seriously at all.”

“Why should I? You’re not my boyfriend.”

Langdon sees Robby wince. He knows it hurt, but he’s past caring.

“What a shitty thing to say,” Robby growls.

“Oh, am I mistaken? Because you’ve never once called me your boyfriend or your partner or anything else. You’ve never defined this, which is probably pretty easy when you don’t tell anybody about it.”

“You know the position we’re in. I am your *boss*. You’re on probation. It’s messy, and we need to protect ourselves, protect this.”

“But everyone already knows!”

“I don’t need a label. I need some fucking honesty –“

“What about what I need?!” Langdon yells. The shock is obvious on Robby’s face; Langdon has never yelled at him like this. “What about me, Robby?! Every second of my fucking life is devoted to you and to recovery! What am I getting in return for it?! Arguments and sex? Jesus fucking Christ, just commit or get off my fucking back!”

“Get off your back.”

“Yes, Robby. We have the same shifts and the same sleep schedule, and when we’re off we’re in this apartment on top of each other all day, and literally the only time in my week I have to breathe is in meetings. And now you want to take that over too. It’s fucking weird! You don’t need a label but you need to see every moment of my day?”

“I am terrified, Langdon! I walk around every day scared that you’re going to start slipping and I’ll miss it, that you’ll need me and I won’t

be there. It is a massive weight that I carry every second, and I just need you to be honest enough to lighten the load!"

"How do you think I can possibly be dishonest with you when you're on top of me all the time?"

"I was on top of you before and you still stole fucking drugs!" Robby screams. "I love you, Frank, but you are a fucking addict!"

The air in the room stills. Langdon's heart is pounding so hard in his ears he can almost convince himself he heard wrong. But the look on Robby's face, a mix of shock and sincerity, tells Langdon he heard right. A strange, sharp anger settles just behind his heart.

"You piece of shit," he whispers.

Robby steps toward him. "Frank, I –"

"Stop," Langdon snaps. "Stop talking. You do not get to say that to me like this."

"But I meant it."

"Did you? Or did you mean the part about what a massive fucking addict I am? Or did you mean the part about how you don't need a label? Or the part about not trusting me? How do any of things equate to love, Robby?"

Robby is silent, a pleading expression in his eyes.

"You said it to win a fight," Langdon says flatly.

"No, I didn't."

"Why'd you say it then? Did you think I'd say it back? Because I won't. I don't love you." Langdon knows the second he says it that he's lying.

Robby's face crumples. Something in Langdon wants to fix it, to comfort this man that he loves so much, but he won't do it. He won't let Robby win this.

"You don't," Robby says.

"No," Langdon says, too loud, trying to convince himself as much as Robby. Then, almost involuntarily, as if someone has possessed him to light this whole thing on fire, he says, "I hate you."

“Okay, Langdon, that’s a little far.”

“Well I do,” Langdon says, feeling tears rolling down his cheeks as he digs his hole a little deeper. “I hate the way you look at me, like I’m a time bomb taking up space in your life. I hate that you think I need to be monitored. I hate that you think I’m not worth being open about, that we only act like a real couple when it’s convenient for you. I hate that you just told me you love me. I hate you so much for that.”

Robby’s face is completely void of expression, his hands shoved in his pockets. When Langdon stops talking, he nods. “Well,” he says. “If you really hate me that much, what are we doing here?”

“Great question,” Langdon snaps.

Robby exhales like something inside him finally gives out. His jaw clenches, and his eyes go cold—distant. “Then I guess that’s it.”

Langdon blinks. “Wh—what?”

“That’s it,” Robby says again, crossing his arms over his chest. His voice is flat. Final. “We should call it.”

“No.” Langdon’s stomach drops. He takes a step forward, like he can somehow un-say everything, fix this by standing closer.

But Robby’s not looking at him anymore. He’s staring at the floor, like whatever existed between them is already buried there. “Can you really see this working after tonight?” he says. “After everything we just said?”

“Jesus, of course I can. We’re angry. That doesn’t mean -”

“Langdon.” Robby’s voice sharpens like a blade. “We’ve been angry for weeks.”

Langdon feels his throat close. “So that’s it? You’re just giving up?”

Robby finally meets his eyes, and what Langdon sees there guts him: not cruelty, not even anger. Just a deep exhaustion. “You’re right. We never defined what this was. Maybe because we both knew it wouldn’t last.”

Langdon’s vision blurs. “Robby.”

“It’s the truth.” Robby’s voice drops to a whisper. “It was probably always going to end like this. Maybe it’s better to get the hard part

over with now. It's too hard to be together."

Langdon doesn't realize he's crying again until he tastes salt on his lips. "Were we even together at all? Or was I just… convenient?"

Robby flinches like he's been slapped. But he doesn't take it back.

"I'm gonna go for a bit," he says instead, reaching for his coat like he's grabbing a life raft. He's using that soft, too-polite voice he saves for the most obnoxious patients. It's worse than yelling. It's worse than indifference. It's detachment. The sound of someone who's already left. "You can… do what you need to do here."

Langdon watches silently as Robby pulls the door open. The door clicks shut. That's when Langdon breaks.

He crumples onto the floor, arms wrapped tight around his middle, as the sobs claw their way out of him. It's not loud, at first. Just breathless, wounded gasps. But it builds, his whole body shaking with it, like he's breaking apart at the seams.

He doesn't go to his meeting. Doesn't pack. Doesn't move, except to finally crawl into bed hours later, face swollen, throat raw from crying.

He lies there in the dark, eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling as he repeats the same desperate prayer in his head: He'll come back. He'll lie down next to me. We'll talk. We'll fix it. He'll come back. He'll lie down next to me…

Eventually, he hears the front door unlocking.

Langdon's heart leaps, his breath catching in his throat. He waits, completely still, pulse pounding in his ears. Robby's footsteps move slowly across the hardwood.

Then they pause outside his door.

Please, he thinks. Please come in. Please take it back.

But after a second, the footsteps continue.

Robby's bedroom door opens. Closes.

Langdon's chest caves in.

He pads into the kitchen on unsteady feet, blinking back the next

round of tears. He opens the medicine cabinet, grabs a bottle of Tylenol. Just Tylenol. Just… something to hold.

He takes it to bed, crawls under the covers, and curls around it like a child clutching a stuffed animal.

The bottle rattles softly in his hand. He shakes it once, twice, like the sound might soothe something in him. Like it might be enough to keep him from spiraling further. Like it might be enough to remind him: You're still clean. You still have that.

But God, it's so quiet. And so cold. And he's so fucking alone.

Langdon closes his eyes. He tries and fails to convince himself the ache in his chest is just exhaustion.

Chapter 10

Langdon calls out of work the next day, feigning illness, saying he's going to be out for a couple of days. He knows Robby will play along with the lie.

He spends the first day in his room, wide awake, barely moving, feeling more than a little shell-shocked at the way the night progressed. He keeps playing the argument back, wondering where it went wrong. He hears Robby's voice in his head: We've been angry for weeks.

He knows he's been angry for a while, but he didn't realize Robby felt the same way. Maybe he didn't want to see it. Maybe he just wasn't paying attention.

It actually takes a couple of hours for it to really sink in that Robby said he loved him. He screamed it, actually. Like Langdon was his disappointing ne'er-do-well son. But Langdon thinks he could forgive that, if Robby would just come into his room and say it again. Langdon would say it back. Everything would be okay. Langdon makes a bargain with the universe: if Robby just says something to him, anything at all, he'll forgive Robby for the whole fight and everything that caused it.

But Robby doesn't come into his room. He goes to work and then comes home, heading straight to his own bed, and Langdon realizes that it actually is over, there's no holding out hope for a reconciliation.

The next day, he waits until Robby leaves for work to start packing things up. He doesn't have a whole lot that's his – he never brought too much more than those original duffel bags – but he spends a lot of the day running his fingers over the pots and pans in the kitchen, taking in all of the books on Robby's shelves. He'd come to think of this place as home, and he knows he's going to miss all the little things.

He thinks about writing Robby a letter. He needs to let him know that he's gone, but a text seems too weird. He finds some paper and a pen and stands at the kitchen island, wondering how to express the anger and guilt and gratitude and love that he's carried over the last six months. Eventually, he decides to keep it simple.

Gotta admit it was fun. I'm sorry for everything.

He leaves the note on the island, calls an Uber, and goes back to his house.

It's dark when he unlocks the door. The air is stuffy, like no one has lived here in close to a year (because they haven't). The house looks exactly the same as it did when Langdon went to rehab: comfortable, a little upscale, full of family photos.

The first thing Langdon does is take them all down.

He doesn't bother going into his master – he doesn't want to pass his kids' empty rooms and he doesn't want to lay down alone on a king sized bed, missing two people. Instead, he pulls some sheets out of the linen closet and throws them on the couch. If he can keep his living area small, maybe his life won't feel so empty.

When his sick leave is over, he requests exclusively night shifts. When he goes to work, he circles the parking lot to make sure Robby's Jeep is gone before he goes in. If the Jeep is still there, he drives around the block twice before trying again. They haven't said a word to each other since that night, and Langdon doesn't think he can handle seeing Robby in this new dynamic. It's better for both of them to make a clean break, anyway. They've always been too close, even before rehab. They need to live their own lives.

Night shifts are not as bad as they were early in recovery. The drug-related stuff still freaks Langdon out, but he doesn't spiral as much as he used to, and as winter turns into spring, he starts to really appreciate being able to save the people he can. More than once, he tells young college students about being in recovery, about how anyone can come this close to ruining their own life if they screw around with pills. He doesn't know if it gets through to them, but he likes that it might.

He stops going to meetings for a few weeks after he starts on nights because his shifts conflict with his old meetings. But one day, he finds himself wandering a grocery store in the middle of the day, reading the ingredients of every single bottle of salad dressing to try and distract himself from how much he wants a pill, and he realizes that trying to stay sober alone makes him feel like a crazy person. He shops around and finds a new group that meets in the mornings, right after his shifts end, full of nurses and bartenders and third shift workers who are just as tired and jaded as Langdon, who haven't relapsed, it

seems, by sheer force of will. Langdon likes the group so much he ends up going basically every day. After a week or two, a heavily tattooed guy named Jim tells him there's a group of them that gets coffee together after meetings, and Langdon should come. So he does.

"Coffee after meetings" roughly equates to "eight addicts rolling into a diner that has no other customers, ordering an entire pie, and sitting in two booths for three hours shooting the shit while a waitress named Sheri fills their cups every five seconds." It is, in a word, heavenly. Langdon adds coffee to his routine. He loves seeing other addicts be regular people, loves talking to them without judgment, loves knowing that they're all cheering each other on.

His life flows into an easy routine: work, meetings, coffee, home to sleep on the couch. He starts getting comfortable going into the master bedroom. He still watches House Hunters, still chews a pack of gum a day. He realizes that he doesn't need anything more out of his life than to work, go to a diner, and go home. Something quiet. Something good.

He never reaches out to Robby, and Robby never reaches out to him.

Spring turns to summer, and Langdon learns to enjoy being single, having his own space. His divorce is official in July, and he sees his kids for the first time in a long time when Abby comes down for a weekend visit. She doesn't let the kids out of her sight, which Langdon understands. He doesn't begrudge her that. He's just so happy to see them. And his relationship with Abby is, surprisingly, not terrible. It's certainly tense, but they co-parent really well from the jump.

He starts working out more. Abbot tells him about a physical therapist for his back. He learns how to deal with cravings. They become less pronounced, less a sharp wave of need and more a dull ache. He still sees Sandra, still takes his Lexapro, still gets a rush of pride whenever she says she's proud of him. He feels like a different person, like the right version of himself.

He still has a hard time sleeping, but when he does, he has the same dream of calloused hands holding his waist, a rough voice whispering that he's going to be okay. He wakes up and ignores the feeling that something's missing.

September comes and the air feels and smells different. Langdon welcomes the coming of fall. The first week, he gets an invitation in the mail. It's from the hospital. They're doing a ceremony on the one-

year anniversary of PittFest. They're giving Abbot, Robby, and Dana plaques in the ED. Langdon laughs. Robby's going to hate it.

In the end, he doesn't go. He doesn't want to see Robby. It just feels too weird for that to be the first time they see each other, at an event that memorializes the worst day in both of their lives. He doesn't know if Robby's seeing anyone, and he doesn't want to find out at a public event. It's just… too hard. Instead, he spends that whole day watching House Hunters, counting the hours until the day's over and he can reasonably go to sleep.

A week after the ceremony, he has a year sober. He takes that day off. Not that he has any real plans to celebrate. He goes to a meeting, has celebratory pie with his coffee friends, and heads home to make Coq Au Vin for himself.

There's a package on the front step when he gets there. It doesn't have any postage, so it must have been dropped off, but it's not wrapped, just a taped-up cardboard box. He brings it inside and opens it.

It's a DVD boxset of a season of House Hunters International.

Langdon pulls it out of the box and notices a card underneath. It says YOU DID IT in comic sans. Langdon rolls his eyes and starts to read.

Frank,
Congratulations on making it a year. I can't express how proud I am of you. I hope you're taking care of yourself, and I want nothing but the best for you.

I miss you every day.

Love,
Robby

P.S. I assume you've watched all 82,000 episodes of House Hunters by now, so I figured you should get started on the spinoffs.

Langdon is surprised that the gesture makes him tear up. He feels like he's been starved for such a long time without Robby. He can't remember why he never reached out, why he never tried, why he spent so long waiting for Robby to apologize when he also fucked up.

He takes a picture of the DVDs with his phone and sends it in a text.

Robby responds immediately. *You like it?*

Langdon smiles as he types back. *Unfortunately I won't be able to watch it because I, like everyone else on the planet, got rid of my DVD player in 2015. But yes, I like it a lot.*

Robby doesn't respond for a few minutes. Langdon watches his phone, sweating as he sees the three dots appear and reappear in their text chain. Finally, a message comes through.

Can I see you

When?

Now good?

Robby is in Langdon's living room 30 minutes later, looking around while Langdon stands behind him, hoping for some reason that he's impressed.

"Quaint," Robby says, looking at Langdon's sofa/bed situation.

Langdon smiles faintly and shrugs. "It's mostly a place to sleep."

Robby leans against the doorway, arms crossed, brow furrowed like he's trying not to say too much. Langdon pretends not to notice. The air between them feels charged, like it knows all the things they haven't said.

"How are you?" Robby asks.

"You know, I'm doing good." Langdon rubs the back of his neck, surprised at how true it feels. "Making it through."

"Not hanging out here all alone all the time?"

Langdon rolls his eyes. "No, Robby. I do actually know how to make friends."

Robby nods, that soft smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. It twists something in Langdon's chest.

"Yeah, I know." He clears his throat and says, "You're not… seeing anyone?"

Langdon hesitates. It's the kind of question he's dreamed of hearing, but not like this. Not after everything. Still, he keeps his voice casual. "No. Not since… everything."

He watches Robby closely as he says it. There's no flicker of jealousy, no flinch—just a slight nod.

"What about you?" Langdon asks.

Robby shakes his head. "No. Not really my focus right now."

Langdon raises an eyebrow. "'Your focus'?"

"I'm, uh, going to therapy. Trying to work on myself, figure out my communication issues before I subject anyone else to my shit."

Something hot and sudden blooms in Langdon's chest. Pride, maybe, or just that complicated cocktail of longing and grief that always seems to show up when Robby surprises him.

"Wow," he says, and he means it. "I'm proud of you."

"It's very new."

Langdon tilts his head. "Hopefully your therapist can help you learn how to eat like an adult."

Robby barks a laugh. The sound goes straight through Langdon like a jolt. He hasn't heard it in so long. God, he's missed that laugh.

"What?" Langdon says, grinning.

"You. Nobody talks to me like you do." Robby's eyes soften. "I miss it. We were friends first."

"We're still friends."

"Yeah?"

"Always."

Something shifts between them then, something fragile and aching. The silence that follows feels too loud. Langdon clears his throat for the sole purpose of cutting the silence.

"Any way I can convince you to come back to days?" Robby asks. "We could definitely use you. You're a good doctor."

Langdon shrugs again. "My internal clock is already set. And I like it, actually. The drug-related injuries and the overdoses used to really freak me out, but I like treating them now. It feels like my way of

giving back."

"That's great," Robby says quietly.

"It is. It gives me perspective. I could've been arrested. I could've hurt my kids or my wife more than I already did. I… I could've died, Robby." The words catch in his throat, but he keeps going. "I spent so long being angry at you for ruining my life. But I understand now. I understand that you gave me my life back. My life wasn't ruined, it was just different. It hurt, and then it got better, and that's all thanks to you."

He swallows, emotions rising thick in his throat. "I know you just got an award for saving all those people last year, but you saved mine, too."

Robby doesn't speak. For a second, he just stares at Langdon. Then, suddenly, he steps forward and hugs him, pulling Langdon in like it's instinct.

"You saved your own," Robby murmurs into his hair.

Langdon lets himself sink into the warmth of him for a second too long, and then Robby is pulling back. Letting go.

"I should go," he says. "I just wanted to say congratulations."

"How did you know? That I was still sober?" Langdon asks.

"I just… figured. I knew you would make it."

Langdon arches his eyebrow. "Really though."

"Abbot kept me updated."

Langdon laughs. "Well, thanks."

"Yeah. See you around?"

"See you around."

Langdon's heart drops as Robby makes his way to the door. But he hesitates, his hand on the knob. His posture is stiff, like there's something left unsaid pressing against the back of his teeth.

"Look," Robby says, spinning back around, "I came here to say something, and if I don't, I'm going to regret it."

Langdon's breath catches. "Okay."

"I miss your friendship, and I miss you at work," Robby says, stepping back into the room, voice rising with urgency. "But really, mostly, I just miss you. I miss us."

"Robby -"

"No, I have to say this." Robby's voice is breaking open, rough and fast. "Because I know I'm not an open book, and I just want to know that you know how I feel. I was such an asshole. We didn't get together at the right time. I wanted you, but I was still so mad about what you put me through, and I was so scared of going through that again. And I shouldn't have said that I love you that night. That was a terrible way to tell you. But I meant it. From the depths of my soul, Frank."

Langdon's hands are shaking. "Robby -"

"And I know the situation was kind of fucked up, and I know I totally blew it, but the six months you lived with me? They were the best months of my adult life. I shouldn't have left you that night. I shouldn't have let you go."

"Jesus, Robby -"

"When they told me they were giving me that stupid plaque, all I wanted was to tell you. All I wanted was for you to be there next to me, whispering some fucking joke in my ear, introducing yourself to everyone as my partner. All I wanted, all I want, is to love you, and I don't want to hide it from anyone. And I don't want to hide from you. And if you want to be friends, that's great, but -"

"Michael."

That stuns Robby into silence. His first name. Langdon has almost never used it. Robby's lips part, breath shaky, his hands half-raised like he doesn't know what to do with them.

Langdon steps forward and takes his hand. Their fingers lace together like they never forgot how.

"The situation was kind of fucked up," Langdon says, voice unsteady but sure. "And we did rush into things. And I was so pissed about how much my life was changing and how much I'd hurt you, and I didn't understand how you still gave a shit about me after everything. I

guess I still don't."

He squeezes Robby's hand. "But being with you and not understanding how I got so lucky is so much better than pretending I don't care about you."

His voice softens, almost a whisper. "I love you, Robby. I always have."

Robby's eyes are wet, chest heaving. "Please let me kiss you."

Langdon nods, just once, and Robby leans in, cupping the back of Langdon's neck with one steady hand.

The kiss is slow - tentative at first, and then sure. Langdon melts into it, into him. Into the safety of it, the relief, the impossible, stupid joy that crashes over him like a wave.

Robby pulls back, just barely, and presses his forehead to Langdon's. "Come home," he whispers.

"Let's go."

They ride back to the apartment together in Robby's massive fucking Jeep and stumble into their tiny apartment. It looks exactly the same, and Langdon's chest loosens just a little bit stepping into the living room. And then Robby leads him into the bedroom, his bedroom, their bedroom.

"Do you want to wait?" Robby asks, but he's already pushing Langdon's shirt up his chest, already mouthing at Langdon's neck the way he knows makes Langdon crazy.

"We've waited long enough."

That's all it takes.

Robby kisses him hard and hungry. His hands cradle Langdon's face like he's something precious. Langdon parts his lips, and Robby deepens the kiss, slow and searching, like he's trying to remember every part of Langdon's mouth.

Langdon melts. There's no other word for it. He melts into Robby's hands, his chest, the solid weight of him. His fingers find Robby's waist, needing him closer. Their clothes fall off in pieces, and then Robby is pushing him into the bed, climbing over him, nipping at his

shoulders. Langdon lets out a soft, broken sound when Robby mouths at the pulse point under his jaw.

Robby pulls back just enough to meet his eyes. His voice is low. “If you let me, I’ll take care of you, Frank.”

Langdon’s breath catches. Robby has always said his name like it’s a vow.

“I missed you so much,” Robby whispers. “Every fucking day.”

Langdon shudders. “Show me.”

Robby does. Langdon lets him.

Together, they find their way back.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Langdon has never gone to a single chip night, but Robby forced him into this one. He talked Langdon's ear off for weeks about how big a deal 18 months was, and Langdon finally relented. Being here, seeing Robby's pride when he gets the chip, makes it worth it.

They go to dinner after, a little Italian place in their neighborhood that they found right when Langdon moved back in. It's become their place - everyone knows them here. Robby tells every single staff member who walks by that his boyfriend is 18 months sober, and their meal gets comped.

When they're at home, they settle into the bed in Langdon's room. They've still never slept in Robby's room. It's really nice, and it's got a king sized bed, but Robby says it doesn't feel like his anymore. Anyway, they sleep on top of each other, wrapped up so tight that a king bed seems a little ridiculous.

"Ready for tomorrow?" Robby whispers.

"If you keep asking, I'm going to get worried that the HR meeting is important," Langdon deadpans. He's officially getting off probation tomorrow, and the hospital is letting him stay an extra year, which is nice of them. But the meeting has evolved a little since Robby told Gloria about them. It's also turned into the How To Date Your Attending informational session.

"So that's a yes?" Robby asks, his brow furrowed. Langdon softens. Robby's recently made a therapy breakthrough and realized he has issues with control (honestly, if that's a breakthrough, Langdon should have been a therapist), and Langdon knows he's been trying really hard not to take over the situation. Robby's not going to be in the room tomorrow, and Langdon can tell it's eating him alive.

"Yes. It'll probably be the most agonizing two hours of my life, but I'm excited to be able to prescribe meds again. And also put my name on the lease."

As part of the divorce, he and Abby sold the house and split the profit. It's enough for him and Robby to buy a small place, but they just can't

let the apartment go. It's so purely theirs. They're renewing the lease soon. In a year, they'll decide their next steps.

It won't matter too much to Langdon. Anywhere with Robby is home.

"Good," Robby whispers, thightening his grip on Langdon's waist. "Me too." He kisses Langdon's temple and whispers against his skin, "I'm so proud of you, baby. I love you so much."

"Mm," Langdon smiles. "I love you too."

They fall asleep together soon after that. Both of them.

In the last six months, Langdon's been sleeping like a baby.

Chapter End Notes

> Okay this was MASSIVELY fun to write and I love all the love it got as I was writing it! Thank you thank you thank you for engaging with this fic, it means the world <3

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